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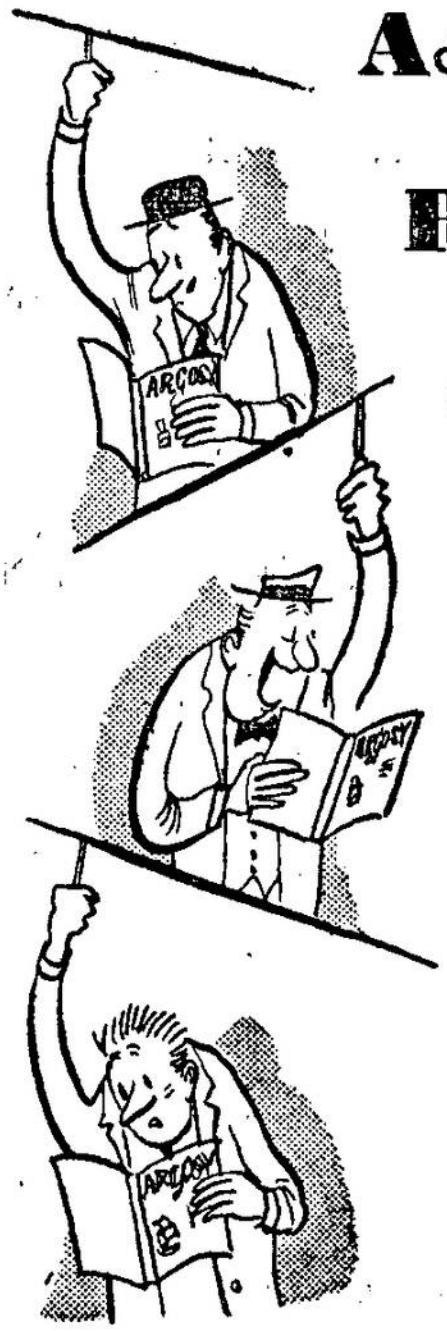

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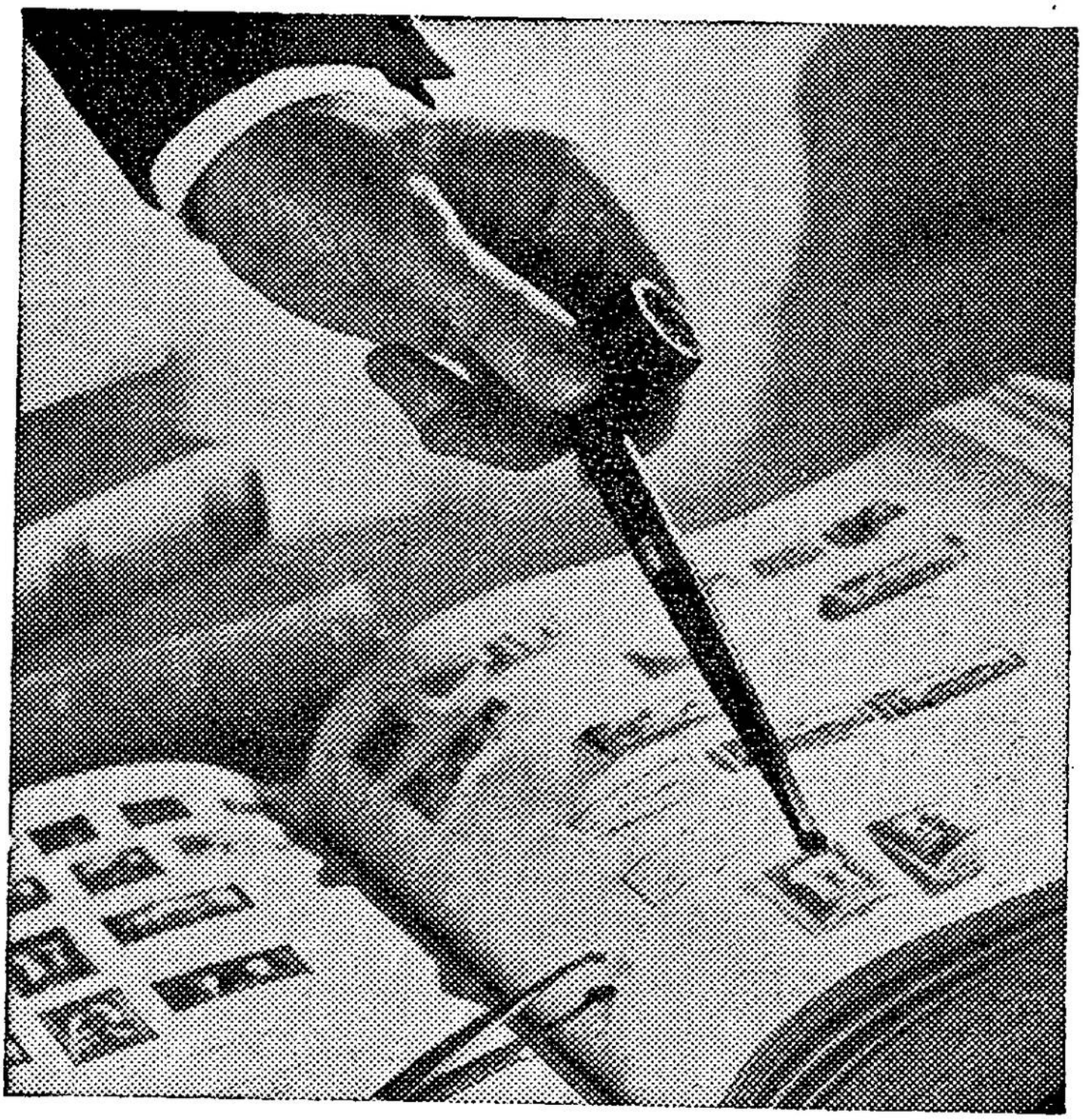

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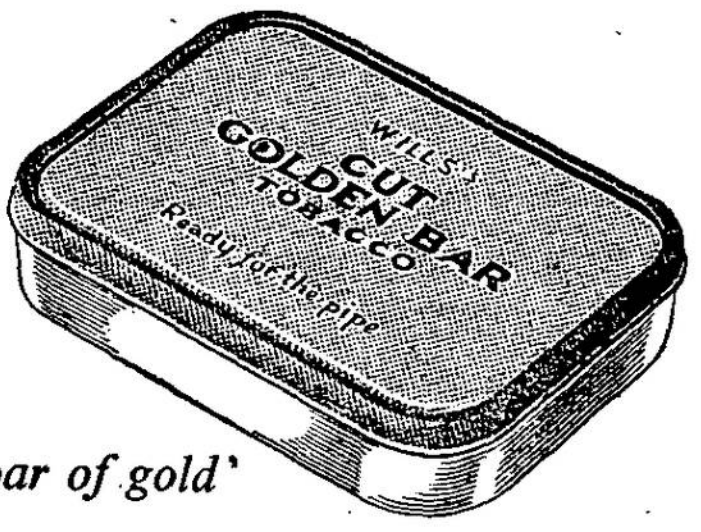

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ARGOSY

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ARGOSY Log Book

AUTOMATION is taking such strides that pretty soon almost every human activity will be reduced to the bare minimum. Except, of course, for Mum's work in the kitchen, since even now all those gadgets the male members of the family bring home are stowed away in drawers while she goes on chopping away with her old knife and, we admit, producing a wonderful apple pie.

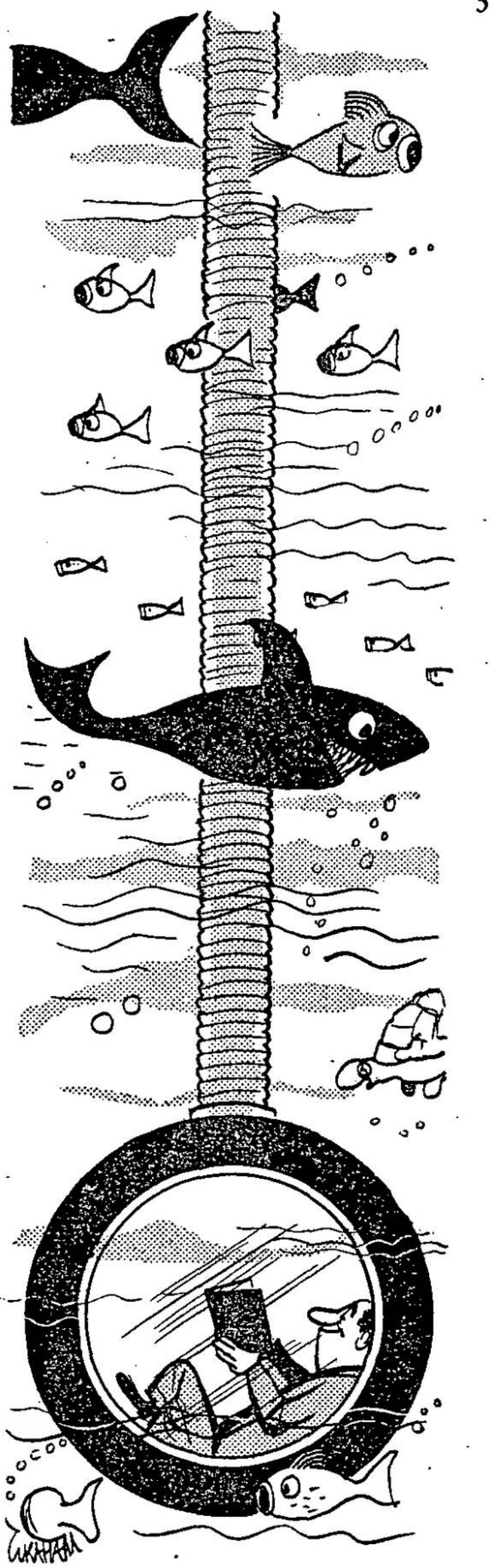
Elsewhere, though, handles will be turned, buttons pressed, levers pushed, and presto! work's over for the day. In the limitless spare time then available what will people be doing? Watching cricket played by robots? Sleeping, reading . . . and here we come up against a snag. If people read, somebody has got to write, and until scientists really harness that monkey who can type out all Shakespeare's plays, we foresee that Argosy authors will have to keep on working away, producing stories full of grip, romance, and suspense.

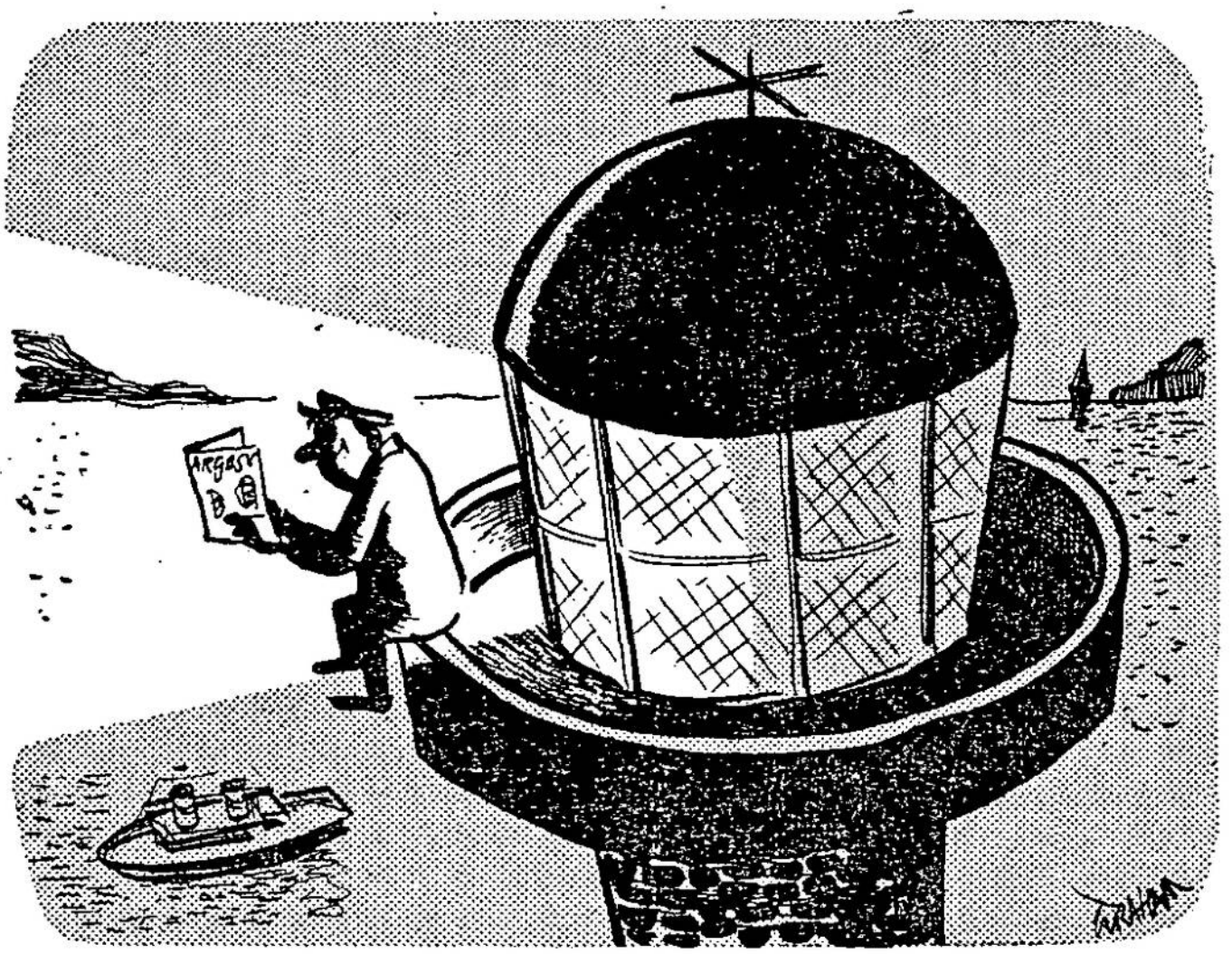
And while they are at it, Mum will be chopping away with her old kitchen knife producing wonderful apple pies. There are some things you've got to do the long way.

Horatio, our old salt on page 6, is often discovered reading Argosy in some decidedly odd places. Readers are invited to write in with descriptions of their own favourite time and place for reading Argosy, and a two-guinea prize is offered for the best, whether probable or improbable. Under twenty-five words, though, please, and send entries *on a postcard*, in block capitals, to The Editor, Argosy, The Fleetway House, London, E.C.4.

Lord Dunsany is as picturesque a character as any of his own creations. His plays have been produced in Dublin, London, New York, and Moscow; he was Byron Professor of English Literature in Athens when it was taken by the Nazis and nothing was heard of him until, months later, he turned up in Dublin refusing to relate his adventures. He lives in Kent and County Meath, loves hunting and shooting, but finds time to fit in an enormous literary output among his country pursuits. He likes to write about what he calls "the mysterious kingdoms where geography ends and fairyland begins," and his chief narrator, Jorkens, has drawn a long bow in most countries under the sun.

Christopher Landon wrote *Ice Cold in Alex* in three weeks—spurred on, maybe, by memories of his own wartime experiences in the desert! It's now being filmed, and he is at present working on a new novel and a TV serial. Landon, who says he has one wife, one daughter, one cat, and one dog, lives in nine acres of jungle near Rye, Sussex, begins writing at 5.30 every morning, plays the guitar when not writing or gardening.





George Johnston, Australian author and journalist, is married to Charmian Clift, another Australian writer, and has collaborated with her on several books and a family of two children. They live on a Greek island where, he says, wine is a penny a glass, cigarettes are threepence for twenty, there is no income tax, the sea is blue, and the sun shines every day. Johnston's first published novel was *Monsoon*; a joint novel with his wife, *High Valley*, won a £2,000 prize for the best Australian novel of 1947. His latest novel, *The Sponge Divers*, has just come out in this country.

Hugh B. Cave was born in Chester in 1910, went to America when he was four. Since 1930 he has lived by writing short stories, novels, plays, articles, radio and TV scripts. He has a passion for Haiti: one of the most powerful mambos (witches) in Haiti is a friend of his, and several of his stories deal with voodoo.

Gerald Bullett wrote his first published novel at the age of twenty: it appeared in 1916 when he was on active service. Since then he has been a regular contributor to literary weeklies and has published many novels, for instance, *The Jury*, besides short stories, anthologies, and poetry. A new novel, *The Daughters of Mrs. Peacock*, is to come out next year.

JOHN SILVER

MME. PINEAU'S THREE SCREAMS

After the second, people stopped laughing

BY DAVID E. WALKER

IT became known, jokingly, of course, as "the night that Madame Pineau saw the murder," and the cream of the joke was that Madame Pineau should have fainted.

In these little Normandy villages that lie along the Channel coast, a weakness of this kind is almost unheard of. And that Madame P. of all people, known to the whole parish as a determined, pious, and sober creature, should have collapsed like that in the rhododendrons, and on a Sunday evening when she was wearing her black dress and black hat, well, that made it more laughable still. From Pourville to Trouville the story spread, and the only person who did not laugh from the very beginning was Edward Lawson, the Englishman who found her.

He had been taking his black Labrador, Bess, for an evening stroll through the raw sea mist and had turned off the main Dieppe/Saint-Valery road down one of the many side turnings, a sunken lane twisting illogically between ploughed fields, when he heard a scream near the empty cottage known as Le Petit Moulin, The Little Mill. The cry was so thin it could even have come from a seagull, but as he passed the gate leading to the garden of Le Petit Moulin, he saw the round figure on the path by the rhododendrons. He climbed the gate and carried Madame Pineau the hundred yards back to her own cottage, where numerous young Pineaux quickly brought her round.

Her story was simple. She had been walking home along the lane when she saw a large man, "a veritable bull of a man," rush out from the empty cottage after a girl she could only describe as young and slim, stab her with "a great knife" till she fell onto the grass beneath the apple trees, then pick up the body and start stumbling up the path towards the rhododendrons. Unwilling to believe her own eyes, Madame Pineau went straight into the garden. She knew, this being Sunday evening, that many men of the neighbourhood would have drunk too much Calvados, the fiery apple brandy of the region, and if it was still

possible to avert a tragedy, then it was plainly her duty to do so.

But it was not until she reached the fringe of the rhododendrons that she suddenly became certain the garden was empty. Although it was a large garden, she knew every inch of it, for she had worked there for the French couple who had originally owned the cottage. All the shutters of Le Petit Moulin were closed, as they had been for more than a year. The silence was complete.

It was in that silence, which had wrapped itself clammily round her shoulders, that Madame Pineau, plump, robust, practical, and in her Sunday best, had fainted.

As she lay on her narrow bed in her own cottage, her pale blue eyes looking straight at Ted Lawson, she even remembered to apologize for the trouble she had caused. Already her family had begun to joke about it and were trying to make her take a glass of Calvados. Lawson patted her shoulder and went out.

He returned at once to Le Petit Moulin. First, he was anxious to make quite sure that Madame Pineau had not been dreaming. He examined the path, the flower-beds, the locked doors of the cottage, and the rhododendron bushes. The ground was damp enough to convince him that only he and Madame Pineau had been there recently. Her tiny footmarks and his own immense ones were clear enough, and there was nothing else.

His second anxiety was the temporary disappearance of the Labrador, Bess. She usually stayed to heel wherever he went and whatever he was doing. He called her name softly and became aware of a dark shadow near the gate. He moved down the path, and there she was, belly to ground, hackles up, in mortal terror. She was shivering all over. He talked to her for a bit, put her on the lead, and started home. Only when they reached the main road did she calm down.

Now darkness was almost complete, and he was glad to see the lights of his own cottage shining against the black mass of the fir trees behind it. A distant, almost comforting rumble proved that the Channel was still running high in spite of the chill mist.

The door led straight to the kitchen, and as he stepped into the light, he saw Mary preparing supper.

"Nice walk?" she said, without turning. He kissed the back of her head where the curls stopped. She was in the shabby jeans she used for painting.

Bess went straight to her bowl and began drinking avidly; her tail was up again, and she seemed normal. He poured out a glass of Calvados from the big jar in the front room, swallowed it at a gulp, and poured himself another, quietly. He was disturbed about the dog.

Not until they had eaten supper before the log-and-pine-cone

fire in the front room did he tell Mary the story. It was all quite a joke, he explained. Madame Pineau fainting, of all people! It would be the laugh of the village for weeks.

"I'm not worried about people fainting," Mary said dryly, "and I still think we ought to take that cottage, haunted or not. It's miles warmer than this wretched little icebox. Just *you* try painting in this cottage on a day like this! I can hardly hold a brush. I'm getting a bit tired of living on the edge of frostbite."

To avoid an immediate reply, he looked round at his wife's canvases, strewed around the room, and the four framed ones on the walls. He knew more about stocks than about art, but people who knew had said she was going to be good. He was accustomed to joking that she would be able to keep him in his old age by selling her pictures. As he was now twenty-eight and Mary was twenty-three, there was still time.

But now this trivial business of finding a better and warmer room as a studio was beginning to worm itself between them. He would try to get a stove or something. It was true the fire warmed only one corner and belched smoke abominably when the wind was in the east. He decided to omit the rest of the story, particularly about Bess. You don't have to tell your wife everything, and in any case she didn't much care for the dog.

"What time are you off tomorrow?" she asked.

"Usual six or so. Anything you want from the Ville Lumière?"

By starting at six each Monday morning, he was able to reach his Paris office by nine. On Friday evening he would be back, to look at the new paintings, produce some presents, make love, relax.

There were times when he felt that perhaps he should take Mary up to Paris more often. She kept saying she wanted to go. But Paris meant dinners, theatres, shopping, and they simply hadn't the money for it yet. It was another of the small, unsolved questions that nagged at them.

At eleven o'clock he gave Bess a last scamper through the wet woods, then tidied the fire for the night. When he climbed the creaking wooden staircase to their bedroom, he found Mary had already gone to bed and was pretending to be asleep.

This part of the story came to be known as "when Madame Pineau screamed the first time."

She screamed again, this tubby little practical French widow, exactly four Sundays later.

Spring was now on the way, and one soon learnt that Le Petit Moulin had been let. The news caused widespread speculation

—would it be an American officer, a French industrialist from Rouen, a wealthy Parisian installing his *poule* for the summer, an English couple, or what?

Madame Pirodet sniffed the air, hoping they would need much laundry done, Monsieur le Curé rubbed his hands and dreamt of his impoverished fifteenth-century church, while at the general store, the butcher's, the shoemaker's hut, and even as far as the tiny hotel in Pourville, there was an air of genial expectation. Not, of course, that these good people of Normandy were robbers, but as they themselves never tired of pointing out, one must live, one must earn one's crust.

For Madame Pineau, the news was particularly welcome. Working for the people at Le Petit Moulin had always been her right, and with so many little Pineaux to feed, the money would be most welcome. Somehow word got around that the arrival would be by car, on the Sunday evening. Many of the villagers chose to include the sunken lane in their evening stroll.

All conjectures turned out to be false. From the trim little Renault stepped a large, grinning Dutchman, very red in the face, and behind him a slim and lovely girl—quite possibly, the villagers reluctantly admitted, his wife. Madame Pineau had taken up her station at the door of Le Petit Moulin, rubbing bony, welcoming hands on her apron and already bobbing and bowing in the direction of the car.

But as the Dutchman strode up the path, past the rhododendrons, she screamed. This came to be known as "Madame Pineau's second scream." She did not faint but stood there, a terrible and puzzled defiance in her round blue eyes, her crinkled little mouth wide open. Then she threw the keys on the gravel path and ran from the scene.

It was after Madame Pineau's second scream that people in Sainte-Marguerite stopped laughing and the first rustle of impending tragedy was felt. While it was well known that old Pineau had often beaten his wife when he was alive, it was still admitted she was a serious and unafraid little person and by no means one to be trifled with. She was as regular at church as she was with her bills, a true Norman. And now here she was, thumping her fist on the table and declaring the Dutchman was the fellow she had seen murdering his wife.

Monsieur le Curé was approached. Would he exorcise the cottage? Would he warn the young wife? Would he speak to the Dutchman, ask him to leave? What *would* he do?

But Monsieur le Curé, a practical priest from the Midi, learnt after the briefest inquiry the Dutchman was not of his faith; and high as he rated Madame Pineau among his parishioners, he

could scarcely, on her evidence alone, use holy water on Le Petit Moulin.

Monsieur le Maire shrugged his shoulders and sided with the priest: these were foreigners, and not to be interfered with unless there was cause or provocation.

It became a collective responsibility, though many felt bitterly that the curé and the mayor had shirked their duty. Madame Lalande, the postmistress, was loudest in saying someone should warn the young wife at once and this was indeed a job for the police; but old Taitbout, taking off his peaked cap to scratch his head, retorted he was called after a crime, not before it.

The whole village was sorry for the girl, but she looked so happy. Why ruin her happiness because of something that might well have been a mere hallucination?

" Well, anyway, let's meet them," Mary said one evening in the Lawson cottage. " New people round here are a welcome change. Go and ask them in for a drink."

After a long silence, Ted Lawson blurted it out. " Look here," he said, " there's one detail I didn't tell you about the original night. Bess was with me. Something *did* happen there that you and I don't understand. Her hackles went up, and she was shivering all over. I'm not the fanciful type, but I don't like it."

" All the more reason to have them in," said Mary. " If the girl is in some kind of danger, which I don't believe, let's meet her and have a look at her. *And* at him."

She gave a laugh just half a tone higher than normal. " The gay, social round," she added. " Nothing like it."

Jan Leyden was indeed " a veritable bull of a man," and Berthe's slim figure was dwarfed by his bulk. They came for drinks, stayed for a meal, and left late. Excusing himself, Lawson went out to the kennel: the Labrador was standing at the end of her chain, silent, hackles bristling, and something he had never seen before, her teeth bared in a silent, almost maniac snarl.

Ted Lawson found it increasingly difficult to look the Dutchman in the face. Jan was a heavy drinker, but then it was understood that all Dutchmen drank heavily. And was it imagination or was it fact that Berthe was not by any means as happy as her manner tried to convey?

Through those spring weekends, they came to know each other better. Squeezed into the baby Renault, they drove inland to the woods that line the Paris road or along the white, winding lanes behind the coast, stopping off, at Jan's insistence, at wayside bistros to " test " the various local brands of Calvados. The

Dutchman professed himself a connoisseur of painting, would seize the brush from Mary's hand, and with a cry of " *So*, it should be *so*! " would correct her landscapes.

" The strange thing is," Mary would say, gazing at the canvas intently, " you're absolutely right. Thank you."

" And another thing I shall teach you, Mary," the Dutchman declared. " Bring round some night any of the four pictures on your front-room walls, and I shall teach you tricks about the varnishing you would not learn elsewhere. There is a secret in this few artists know."

One night when they were alone in their cottage, Mary said, " You know, Ted, I think Berthe is a fool, a fool and possibly a coward into the bargain. I've been seeing something of her during the weekdays, when you and Jan are up in Paris, and she's been talking about Jan. She doesn't know how to handle him. She's scared. It seems that before they were married he used to have drinking bouts and he went pretty mad, didn't know at all what he was doing, and now she has a presentiment he's slipping back a bit. What she doesn't understand is that Jan is an artist. Their trouble is she simply doesn't talk his language."

Ted gazed into the empty fireplace.

The implication was fairly obvious: he for his part didn't talk Mary's language. In a quiet and rather prosaic way, he simply loved her.

" If that girl doesn't take care," Mary went on, " she *will* land into trouble and old Madame Pineau's hallucination will become fact, after all. A man drunk on Calvados becomes a lunatic, a blind, irresponsible animal. Now, don't laugh at me if I tell you the only way he can be saved is through art, through painting, through something outside himself. And Berthe will never succeed. She may even be murdered before she has a chance to succeed. She doesn't even know how to set about it . . . Usual six-o'clock start tomorrow? "

" Bit earlier, actually," said Ted. " Let's make coffee now."

Madame Pineau had found a woman from Quiberville to work in her place at Le Petit Moulin. The villagers had begun to shun the Dutchman and his wife, as if aware tragedy hung over the house. But at the butcher's, the general store, the little hotel, they went out of their way to be sympathetic to Berthe, always longing to give her a warning, yet never quite daring to interfere.

The whole neighbourhood by now realized the man was not normal. But he was a good spender, a man who paid cash, and there was nothing definite one could hold against him.

Regularly, in the centuries-old church, Madame Pineau, kneeling against the worm-eaten wooden pews, prayed that what she had seen had been some kind of evil dream, divorced from reality, present or future.

It was in July—again a Sunday—that Madame Pineau screamed for the third—and last—time.

Ted Lawson had been out on one of his long walks with the Labrador and had decided to return by the lane leading past Le Petit Moulin, if only to discover whether Bess had learnt to pass it without cringing.

It was late evening but not altogether dark; there was neither sea mist nor seagulls to remind him of Madame Pineau's first experience. But—and it gave him a sudden shock he couldn't explain—there was Madame Pineau!

"Good evening, Madame Pineau." He tried to smile. "Why are you here?"

"I don't know. I don't know. Something is wrong."

Then they heard the sounds from Le Petit Moulin. As he ran to the gate, he saw the enormous Dutchman emerging in the half light behind the girl.

In the deepening dusk, the flash of the knife was sharp and clear, and the girl fell.

Lawson rushed up the path, but already Jan was forcing his way through the rhododendrons. He could hear Madame Pineau making sobbing noises behind him, and shouted to her, "You look after Berthe, Madame Pineau."

Jan was outstripping him, heading towards the woods in a direction that led to the Lawson cottage, where, hours before, Ted had left Mary painting.

Swinging left, with the Labrador beside him, Lawson took the short cut to his own place. The Dutchman was mad, and Mary was alone.

Behind him he heard Madame Pineau scream, the third scream, and a babble of words.

The light in his cottage was on, and he breathed a sigh of intense relief.

He burst through the door to the kitchen. On the threshold, he stood stock-still and closed his eyes for a second. Beside the little gas stove, Berthe was watching over his supper. "Ted, what's happened? Why do you look at me like that?"

He felt paralysed.

He could say nothing; he just stared at her. She shrank back against the kitchen table.

"Ted, you don't mind my being here? It's just for a bit. Mary will be back soon . . . but Jan was beginning one of his

bouts, and I'm a coward . . . and Mary said . . . she said she'd be back soon. She promised . . ."

Already he had stopped listening to her. He strode through to the front room, but there was something about it that stopped him at the door. It was seconds before he realized what it was.

One of the four paintings was gone.

★ *David E. Walker, journalist and author, has spent most of his working life in the newspaper world. At present he is on the staff of a London daily, but he worked abroad (almost everywhere except China, South America, and the U.S.S.R.) for fourteen years as a foreign correspondent. He's married, has one son. His best-known books are The Rigoville Match and Adventure in Diamonds. Just now he's holidaying in Normandy, at the scene of the crime.*

★ ★ ★

ATTENTION, PARENTS!

Children should be seen and not heard, we know, but here are some parents who might have, and sometimes did raise legitimate grumbles from their unfortunate offspring. Allow one point for recognizing the parents, or parent, one for the author, and one for the source in each case, making a possible total of 21. Answers are on page 80.

1. *A husband stuffed with honourable parts, the wedding for Thursday, what more could any parents provide? And how dare their puling daughter object!*
2. *A nursing mother, but pepper and beating were her recipe for child welfare.*
3. *What is a tumble downstairs, an ink-bespattered daughter to this fond mamma—her real child is Africa. As for papa, he went to the wall long ago.*
4. *He was a generous father, at first sight, for he gave his prospective son-in-law a cheque for £1,000—but signed it Charlie Chaplin.*
5. *Three husbands, or was it four? And her nickname was more suited to a horse than a mother.*
6. *Were there ever two such difficult parents! Her mother would never see her again if she did* not *marry a certain clergyman, her father would never see her again if she* did.
7. *A mother like a ripe greengage, and no father on the scenes at all. It was left to grandma to suggest a jazz band as a suitable profession for the four children.*

ECHOING DREAM

Motionless under her black mantilla
she listened with absorbed dark eyes

BY LORD DUNSANY

IN the course of a year or so I think that most topics have their turn at our club; and one day we were discussing the feasibility of possession by evil spirits, and in spite of all examples quoted, the weight of the opinion of the Billiards Club appeared to be against it, when Jorkens joined in with the remark, "I should say it was quite possible."

"Ever seen a case of it?" asked Terbut.

And for a while Jorkens was silent. And then he said, "No."

"Then what makes you think it is possible?" said Terbut.

"Well," said Jorkens, "it is a long story." And Terbut uttered a sigh and Jorkens began.

It was in a southern country and a long way to the west, a land of earthquake-rumpled hills, and the hospitality of hearts warmed by that southern sun. My kind host had a Caribbean cook and a Guatemalan gardener, who seemed to understand the gorgeous flowers that bordered all the lawns, and for whom they seemed to thrive. And he employed an odd man as a mechanic, to look after all the machinery that he had in his house and grounds, and to attend to anything that went by electricity, and to see that it did, and in addition to that, he did every job that the Guatemalan and Caribbean neglected to do.

So he was really a very industrious man, though where he learnt industry I have no idea; that land was too warm to have taught him, and he came from some sunny shore of Andalusia that would not have taught him, either. He was just a freak, a throwback perhaps to some old conquering horseman left behind by the Moors.

And another odd thing about him, besides his industry in that warm land, was what my host told me about him as we sat in his garden, when the heat of the day was beginning to cool, and the sun that had gone from the white walls was brightening the red of the tiles and the tops of palms and making the oranges flame, and the odd man walked past us along a row of hibiscus.

My host also came from southern Spain, but long generations ago, a forbear of his having been a conquistador by profession, who had left his Spanish towers to carry religion after the setting sun and to plant it far in the west, where he had possessed himself of lands as wide as a good-sized county, and the King of Spain had made him Count of the Golden Mountains, for there was a range on the lands of his conquest which had been thought to be gold. And these lands his family had held for ages till the curse of modernism, as my friend put it, had left him with no more than a grand old house—built under the influence that was the pagan Moors' rather than of the religion for which his sires had fought—and some spacious and lovely gardens shadowed by cypresses.

And as his odd man now walked under orange trees and past a blaze of hibiscus, Mr. Sierradoro, which is the name in use today by that old line of conquistadors, told me this of his odd man.

He had asked him, he said, when he first employed him, if he ever took dope, and the man said no; and he had asked him if he drank, and he said only seldom, but that he was sometimes possessed by an angel. And my host had asked him if that happened to him often, and he had said no. And so he had decided to chance it.

"I judge a man," Sierradoro said, "by the amount of work he gets through in a year. I never dismiss a man because he gets incapacitated on a feast day or a holiday and for most of the day after. I judge by his total output. This man gets through a wonderful amount of work in the year, both his own and other people's, and I shouldn't dream of parting with him just because he may go off for a whole day and not quite know what he is doing."

"What kind of things does he do?" I asked.

"Well, for instance," he said, "one day a queer look came into his face and he said he was possessed by his angel, and I could see by his eyes that something of the sort had occurred."

"What sort of thing?" I asked.

"You never can tell," said Sierradoro. "But he said he must play some music, and he set off down the road to look for a violin, and I saw it was no use stopping him."

"Did he find a violin?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said. "But the trouble was that all the girls that he met as he went down that road followed him, and some children too. I think he did get hold of a violin, because I heard some rather queer music in the distance, and from complaints that I heard later it seemed that it was a long time before

any of the girls came back, and all the children who followed him were out late.

" It only happened once, but he won't promise that it will not happen again. He is a good man and I shouldn't dream of dismissing him. But I have told him that if he does get like that again and feels that he must play music, he had better come in here and play on my organ. That will prevent any more trouble outside, and I have promised the neighbours, that there shall not be."

Sierradoro had a very fine organ; not in a central place on any wall, but rather as an incidental feature of the great room.

I was about to ask what abilities he had with an organ, when the handy man turned and came back along the flowers, facing us as he came, and I saw that he was of a quite illiterate type and that, whatever he could do with machinery and whatever he knew about flowers, he would never be able to handle such an instrument as an organ.

I stayed some time in that house of a bygone day, entertained by Sierradoro with such courtesies as, I fear, may almost be called bygone too. And then, one afternoon, I heard my host say in a low voice to his wife, " I am afraid that man Huan is possessed again today."

" Why? " she exclaimed at once.

" There is that look again," he said.

" Are you sure? " she asked.

" I think so," he said.

" Then get him indoors at once," she said. " We cannot have him making all that trouble again."

And Sierradoro went to look for his odd man, while the Señora and I stayed in the long room in which the organ was built into a wall.

She wore a long mantilla of fine black lace, whether because she herself was Spanish, or because of the lineage of her husband, I did not know, but she certainly wore it with a natural grace that seemed to show she was born to it.

She was troubled about Huan, for she did not estimate him, as her husband did, by the amount of work he accomplished so much as by the risks that his strange seizures, as she named them, entailed.

" But is there any harm in him? " I asked.

" There is always harm in a drunken man," she said.

" What do you think he will do? " I asked.

" There is no telling with drink," she replied.

" But is it drink? " I asked.

"There are only two things," she said, "that will make a man act like that."

"Drink and love?" I suggested.

"Sí," she said.

"And you think it is drink in his case?" I asked.

"But certainly," she replied. "One cannot miss a woman. And I have watched. Bottles are so much smaller that they are more easily hidden."

And then Huan came in with that look in his eyes. I don't know where Sierradoro had found him; probably doing some useful job that the gardener had neglected, but with that look in his eyes. I saw it the moment he entered: a look as far from us as we were from heaven. He was dressed in a thin shirt, open all down the front, for it was a warm day, and a pair of trousers, and shoes that were more like sandals. He wore no socks.

As soon as Huan saw the organ an awed look came in his face, and he almost ran to it. His fingers were stained with the dark oil of some machine at which he had been working; he spread them upon the keys as he sat down, and then he began to play.

The music rose up from under his hands at once. It was like torrents coming down the faces of brazen mountains which rang with them as they fell; torrents full of river-nymphs in the gold of the dawn, singing, as they swam by, their songs to a quiet land turning from sleep below, to the sound of sheep-bells and pipes of awakening shepherds. There was lark-song in it and the sound of trumpets, and it seemed full of old memories of all melodious things ever heard long ago.

It set me somehow thinking about my childhood and my earliest pictures of heaven, but that music seemed to brighten them, making them more like visions. And it made me think of acres of may in bloom, and they somehow seemed to be singing, singing of things long gone, but brought back by that music.

Before our eyes as we looked out of the window, Sierradoro and the Señora and I, were the flowers of that warm land shining in the late sunlight, and from a lily-pond in the garden came the roaring boom of the bullfrogs; but we did not seem to see or notice these things, or anything but the music, as it flowed over deep soft carpets and filled the room to the rafters, and lingered among old memories brought back to our day and enchanted. That's how it seemed to me as he played, and a great deal more that I can never describe, for words limp far behind music.

The Señora was looking past me out of the window, as though to something very far away, and Sierradoro had his gaze fixed on something else—one couldn't tell what—and he seemed to be puzzled by it, whatever it was. Huan's back was towards us so

that I could not see his face, but his head was lifted upward, away from the keys on which he seemed to play with the ease of a butterfly's dances. I wondered if he was conscious of what he was playing. The Señora, motionless under her black mantilla, seemed hardly to hear the music, so absorbed were her dark eyes with the vision the music had shown them. Nor did Sierradoro appear to be within years of what was happening here.

Horns from a far country seemed to be luring and calling, as those hands flashed over the keys like shadows of birds migrating; birds of paradise, as I fancied, on a flight from their distant home. I wondered who had taught this miraculous art to the peasant from Andalusia. And then I suddenly saw it was as he had said, and that what you were talking about just now was possible, and that he was possessed by an angel.

The music flowed on with that astounding ease and that clear call to Sierradoro and his wife and to me, but all to different dreams. And in the great flood of that music, all heaven seemed to be smiling, and earth and its common things to be glowing in that smile's radiance. The large leaves of bananas in the garden outside, slowly swaying, seemed lit by that smile, and the shadows of leaves of an olive on a white wall seemed to rest with an infinite rest, and in that rest there seemed to be living again old memories of the simple things of our world, and I thought I could hear bells chiming in valleys of lost summer evenings.

Then the spirit that played that organ seemed growing weary of earth, for there came a longing into the music more wistful than any of ours, as the sadness of all earth's sorrows weighed more and more on his wings, and he seemed to be yearning now for his far home and to sigh for the glories of heaven that he had left. And then he suddenly ended on one great note, like a thunderbolt falling upon mountains of bronze and setting their peaks a-ringing, and a window of heaven seemed to have been thrown open, and I thought I heard its choirs singing their answer with the sound of a far rejoicing, or was it but the sound of Huan's music coming back from heaven's walls?

I could not tell. But I thought at the time that all the others were calling him with their unearthly musical voices, and—was it possible—me too, who was so far from heaven and did not know the way.

And the boom of the bullfrogs came back, and the Señora withdrew her gaze from that far past where it had wandered, and I left all that I left in far-away days, and Sierradoro came back with me to the present, and Huan rose up and brushed his hands together, as a man leaving a job that has been forced on him, and walked out of the house, and I heard the smack of his

spit hitting the paved path as he hurried back to his work, the plain peasant again.

And outside the window I saw the evening light reflected upwards from ripples that the bullfrogs made in the lily-pond, pale gold on the under side of the leaves of a lemon tree; and, something causing me to lift my gaze, I looked on and slanting upwards, with gold light shining on large leaves, on and on, till my eyes met golden clouds which parted asunder as though making a pathway all the way to the lily-pond, till it was almost lost in the radiance to which it led. And into that radiance I saw, just as it passed from sight, what may have been a flock of white herons or anything else, but which looked like two great wings with which a spirit departed. And up that golden vista it seemed to go right into heaven.

I would have followed, I would have followed indeed, for I felt I could. I don't know how, but I felt I could have walked up that shining pathway into heaven. But just at that moment, just as I would have gone, I heard a door slamming, the door of the engine-shed, actually, in which that fellow worked; and the gates of heaven closed.

★ ★ ★

AVE ATQUE VALE

My kind sister-in-law Adela (who was often called " Nena " or Girlie), arranged a dancing party in our honour at the Terpsichore Gardens, to introduce me to her friends.

About fifty couples had been invited. My head began to swim after the third introduction and by the end of the evening I was lost. I had met Sr. de la Garza y Garza, Sr. Garza Gonzalez, Sr. Gonzalez Garza, Sra. Gonzalez de Garza y Garza, Nena Garza de Gonzalez, Sr. Treviño Garza, Sr. Treviño Gonzalez-Garza, Nena Garza de Treviño, Sra. Treviño de Treviño, and so on and so on, mostly Garza Gonzalez with Treviño in endless combinations. These happen to be the most common family names in Monterrey, and each family is much intermarried with the others, and all are prolific.

I said to Adela, " I am done for. I'll never remember *anybody's* name. Whatever shall I do? "

" Just speak to everybody you see, and say *Adios*," she advised me. But I protested. I had studied enough Spanish to know that *adios* means " Goodbye."

" Oh, but you wouldn't say it like that, ' *adios*,' meaning ' Goodbye,' " explained Adela, horrified. " You say it this way. ' *Adiooooooos?* ' That way it means ' Hello! ' "

ELIZABETH BORTON DE TREVINO, *My Heart Lies South*

A WREATH FOR AUNT HANNAH

" Joe," his wife asked severely
" is it quite nice ? "

BY LESLIE BONNET

" YOU must not let it upset you so," said the village schoolmaster's wife. She reached across the table and refilled his teacup.

Mr. Maiden got up with an irritable shrug and stood before the wide window, looking out at the naughty village of Lashings Episcopi. The heavy sunshine of a summer afternoon gilded his short figure, and made much of his bald head. His face was still boyish, and the look of suppressed impatience, which years of trying to move events faster than they would be moved had imprinted, was now even more distinct than usual.

" Well, I am upset," he said. " It makes one wonder if—"

" Now, my dear," purred his wife.

" But really," he protested. " I went into Raggett's front garden. There was honestly nothing out of the way. True, old Raggett was staggering about carrying a young man in his teeth and growling like a dog. But the young man was a stranger and there seemed to be no ill will involved. And then, within a moment, indecorum was rife. I can't understand this place, even yet. Every situation seems to resolve itself into rude laughter."

" Come and drink your tea, my dear," urged Mrs. Maiden.

No thinking person would deny that Mr. Maiden had been affronted. The fact that Mr. Raggett called next morning to appease him proves it. For old Raggett was not quick to apologize.

He had knocked on the schoolmaster's door on the Monday morning, a powerful-looking man in the late fifties. He was not at all portly, but his frame was almost as broad as it was long; and a long-skirted, big-pocketed jacket, hanging down above trousers stuffed into black leggings, accentuated that impression.

The two had talked on the doorstep, Raggett gesticulating, and after a while Mr. Maiden nodding. Then they had walked away together towards the school in obvious amity. Lashings Episcopi concluded that one more local crisis had resolved itself.

Nothing of this would have happened if Joe Raggett's aunt had not been taken ill the week before.

"What, poorly again, poor creature?" Mrs. Raggett had exclaimed with ladylike concern.

"Ill, desperate ill," Raggett had snapped at her, banging the dresser with his fist.

Mrs. Raggett eyed him with a respectful deference, which, in view of her own dignified bearing, was a tribute to his masterfulness. "Well, I don't see why it should put you out so," she said doubtfully.

"Pneumonia. Double pneumonia," Raggett announced with relish.

Mrs. Raggett pursed her ripe lips. "Ah, the poor thing."

"Triple, most likely—with complications." He wagged his head and his small eyes glinted. "Over at Pendleton Hospital she is. They say I ought to see her—quick."

"Dear goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Raggett. "On a Saturday! What about the bowling-match, Joe?"

"Yes, drat it!" said Joe, scratching his head. "But I'll have to go. Can't take the trap, the mare's still lame."

"And the morning bus just went through."

"What?" shouted Joe, stamping with rage. "Why didn't you tell me, Martha?"

"I didn't know you wanted it, Joe," Mrs. Raggett replied nervously.

Joe stamped again and strode over to the little diamond-paned window. He stared hard down the neat front garden at the lane, as if to conjure the bus out of schedule by sheer will-power.

"Was ever such a thing?" he lamented, turning round to her and flinging his arms wide. "And the afternoon bus'll be too late, drat it. I shall have to get Sam Barley and his taxi."

"Shall I go for him, Joe?" she said quickly, anxious to get away.

"Yes, you'd better," said Joe, throwing himself down in dejection in the worn armchair. "But think of the expense. Think of the waste, woman. Go on. Don't stand there clucking. It's life and death, you stupid."

And Mrs. Raggett had pinned on her hat and was out of the door with fearful alacrity.

She was back unexpectedly soon. Joe had heard the car draw up in the lane. He turned round impatiently as the latch clicked and his wife came in, breathless. He was rummaging savagely in the drawers of the dresser. "String," he grunted. "Isn't there a bit of dratted string in the house?"

Mrs. Raggett quickly found some. "How much, dear?"

"Oh, I shall need a goodish bit," said Joe, thumbing his knife, "more than six feet of it. I'd better take the lot. I think I'll just measure the old girl up—on the quiet—while I'm there. It'll save another journey, perhaps."

"Joe," she ventured, drawing herself up severely, "is it quite nice?"

Joe squared his big shoulders. "Now look here, Martha—"

"All right, Joe," she said hastily.

Joe went to the door. "Coming, Sam," he roared.

Mrs. Raggett heard the bang of the door, the vigorous footsteps of her husband down the flagged path, the shouted greetings, the slam of the car door, and the murmur of its departure. Then, with a comfortable sigh, she relaxed her attitude of fearful attention and began to clear up the inevitable disorder that a man creates merely by moving into and out of a room.

She was a handsome woman of some forty years, upright, with a bright clean complexion, her claim to being downright attractive weakened only by that expression of conscious rectitude always seen upon the faces of those married to uproarious husbands.

She had not busied herself about the kitchen for long before the door was flung open again.

"All alone, Mum?"

Martha turned round. "Hullo, Gladys. You're back early."

"Yes, the office closed early this morning. Not much doing."

"Well, get your things off. Dinner'll soon be ready."

Gladys, it is apparent, will look like her mother one day. But for the present she is a most presentable young woman. Her legs, perhaps, as she stretches to hang her coat on the hook on the kitchen door, are just a little too solid. But that is a fault that quite a number of admirers have shown themselves ready to overlook. A little overdressed, plump face, full figure, a gleam on her where the clear skin stretches to encompass its burden, she is the kind of girl the prudent mother so anxiously warns, "Now, don't cheapen yourself, dear." But in her present home-with-mother mood no admonishments were necessary.

An afternoon of peace resulted from Raggett's absence. Gladys was not going out till evening. Then the pictures in Pendleton and her new young man would claim her. Besides being ever so nice, he was smart and superior and had a steady job with the council. Both Gladys and her mother had high hopes of him.

Tomorrow he was coming to Lashings Episcopi on his first visit to the family. So the afternoon was spent happily in doing-up in his honour.

It was cool in the little kitchen. Outside, the hard heat of an August afternoon tormented the massed snapdragons in the front-garden borders, and threw up a glare of light from the white grit lane beyond the solid garden hedge. Where the well wall threw a sharp shadow, the cat sprawled in unselfconscious abandon.

It was heavy and quiet. Mother and daughter worked, talking in low tones. Their chief topic was the necessity of preventing Mr. Raggett from shocking the young man next day by any common or vulgar behaviour.

"Not that you can stop him," lamented Martha. "If you hush him he gets louder. We must hope for the best." Which was a wise conclusion.

It was late when Joe stormed in again. Gladys had already returned from the pictures. They heard his passionate farewells to the taxi-owner, Sam. Then the door was heaved almost off its hinges. Joe stood there, firm as a rock, not a sway on him, grinning goodwill.

Martha gave him the quick look that is thrown at husbands on such entries. There was nothing amiss, nothing except for a funeral wreath of white and blue blooms that was hung around his neck.

Martha pretended not to notice it. "Well, how was Aunt Hannah?" she asked severely.

"Sinking. Sinking fast," said Joe, so cheerfully that he must have been thinking of something else. Indeed, he quickly realized this himself, and added in more appropriate tones, "Little hope."

At the same time he delved into one of his capacious pockets and dragged out a limp length of string. He showed a knot towards one end of it and gave a portentous wink. Then he noticed that Gladys was gazing fixedly at his neck.

"Ah yes," he said, putting up his hands and drawing the funeral wreath carefully over his head. "I got this cheap at Pendleton, being Saturday, you see. It's wilting a bit, but"—giving the blooms a hearty smoothing over with one great hand—"it'll freshen up. Tell you what. Keep it in the wash-bowl. It'll last till we want it."

"Oh Mum," said Gladys.

"Yes, I should hope not," agreed Mrs. Raggett. "With young Stanley Wilkins coming to tea tomorrow. What would he think, indeed?"

"Well, I'll tell you what," said Joe, with the desperate reasonableness of the inebriated. "Put it down the well. Fill the bucket, put the wreath on top, and let it down in the water. It'll keep fresh like that for ever."

" What about when we want water? " argued Martha.

" Well, you only have to take the wreath off." On these terms settlement was reached.

The next day, Sunday, was as bright and clear as ever. As soon as lunch was done, Mrs. Raggett and Gladys began to prepare for the visitor. No coaxing could persuade Mr. Raggett to adopt suitable clothing. " Too hot for dressing up," he declared irritably.

However, they brushed and scrubbed him into some resemblance of respectability and, fearing that to go further would provoke an uproar, left it at that.

Four stools were round the table in the front garden, ready for tea. The long narrow lawn was well cut, the front gate was oiled, and mother and daughter, both arrayed in the unexciting severity of Sunday frocks, felt that there was no more that could be done.

Gladys had gone so far as to wear a hat at home. It was a saucy little boater with an upturned brim. Red cherries clustered round the crown of it. But her forehead began to perspire. And that would have been common. So the hat was left on the table to impress by itself.

Then, to the minute, on a gleaming bicycle, arrived Stanley Wilkins, purple with exercise and embarrassment.

What a desperate constraint there was on this formal meeting! And there is no knowing how long the agony of stiffness might have lasted had not Stanley and Mr. Raggett taken an immediate liking to one another.

The ladies watched this fraternization with the deepest satisfaction, grateful too that Joe did not seem, in good humour as he was, to be about to become too noisy. They were talking of old days and the characters who lived and had lived around.

" Come inside, young man," suggested Joe. " It's too hot out here. We'll sit in the back parlour, comfortable, while the women get some tea."

They went in together in the friendliest manner.

" I wish Dad wouldn't call us women, Mum," said Gladys. " I'll just draw some water."

Martha stood waiting for her, a grudging smile of pride and satisfaction on her lips. Gladys was winding the windlass. There was the usual clanking as the bucket came up.

" Oh Mum! "

" Yes, Gladys? "

" I've dropped the wreath in the water."

" Goodness," shrieked Martha, hurrying to the wellside. She

rested her hands on the brickwork and looked down. Yes, she could see, about ten feet down where the water was, there lay the wreath, tilted drunkenly, slowly submerging.

"Oh, whatever shall we do?" whispered Gladys.

"We must get it," said her mother grimly.

"Can't we just say nothing—till after?"

"No. Your father's bound to ask when we go in with the water. And he'll go red-mad if he knows. I wouldn't have Mr. Wilkins see him like it for anything. You must get it."

"But how, Mum?"

"Climb down the rope. I'll hold it tight."

"But, Mum, I shall have to go right down into the water to get it. I can't pick it up with my feet." She laughed hysterically.

"No, I've got it," muttered Mrs. Raggett, quickly unhooking the pail from the rope. "Lay across there, Gladys."

"Why, Mum?"

"Don't argue," said Martha, grunting with concentration. She tied a careful knot round the solid ankles of Gladys while the wondering girl lay across the parapet with her eyes staring down into the well.

"Now, wait a minute, hold on with your hands while I wind the rope up." And the reluctant Gladys, clutching the edge of the parapet, felt her legs being hoisted up over her back until she thought it would surely break. She heard the safety ratchet slam into the cogs. Then Mother lifted her by the waist.

"Down you go, dear," said Mother with desperate kindliness. "Tell me when you've got hold of it." And without further blandishments, she seized the well-handle, threw out the safety ratchet, and lowered Gladys head foremost down into the wet darkness.

The gallantry of the untried maiden was praiseworthy. There was an "Oh Mum," with a hint of reproach in it, as the tapering limbs slowly disappeared. But no more.

Wish I'd thought to tie her skirts round her, thought Martha as she gazed down with concern. But the regret was a vain one. Mr. Raggett had all the string.

Meanwhile, Mr. Raggett and Stanley had been getting on very well. "I've always been terrible strong," Joe was winding up. Stanley nodded belief.

"In the jaws too," asserted Joe.

"Ah," said Stanley.

"I can still pick up a man in my teeth."

"Go on, can you?"

"Would you like me to try?" grinned Joe in the highest good humour. "Go on, then, lie down on the sofa."

"There!" With a grunt Joe seized the willing assistant by the seat of his trousers and, with a heave, hoisted him in the air and stood swaying with the odd burden in his teeth.

"Come on," he grunted, anxious to share the fun with the ladies, and he lumbered uncertainly through the kitchen. The door was open and he reached the threshold still gripping his prize, and yet with enough good spirits to add to the humour of the situation by barking—in rather a muffled way, it must be confessed—like a dog.

He was a little disconcerted, however, to see, coming up the garden path, the dumpy figure and anxious face of Mr. Maiden, the schoolmaster.

He was severely dressed in grey suiting and wore a straw hat. It had speckles of black in it, to refute any suggestion of carefree gaiety.

Joe Raggett had presence of mind enough to stop barking. But there was little else he could do in a moment to ease the awkward situation. It was not even possible to assume any ingratiating facial expression while his jaws were so rigidly employed.

Mr. Maiden, on his side, accepted the state of affairs as he found it with commendable aplomb. He was, it is true, momentarily disconcerted at the sight of Mr. Raggett's unconventional behaviour. But he observed that the strange young man dangling so ingloriously from Mr. Raggett's jaws bore no expression other than one of embarrassment, so he concluded charitably that Joe was not actually biting him—yet. He noticed too that Mrs. Raggett was bending, a picture of ripe womanhood, over the well, apparently quite unperturbed by events.

So, beyond an involuntary start, he gave no sign of dismay, but pattered briskly up to Joe, and greeted him with almost lunatic heartiness.

Joe did not—could not—answer him, but stood swaying in uncertainty. Mrs. Raggett, disturbed by the schoolmaster's entry and taking in the situation with one incredulous glance, came swiftly up the lawn and joined the group in the fond hope of averting a scene.

But Mr. Maiden gave her no chance to intervene. Anxious to complete his errand, he said briskly, "I've good news for you, Joe. They rang me from the hospital only an hour ago. I said I would drop in and tell you. Your aunt has taken a turn for the better. She should recover, they say."

Joe started in astonishment. The movement was too much, even for a Sunday suit. There was a sharp rending sound, and Stanley Wilkins, sundered from the seat of his trousers, fell earthwards. He, unprincipled youth, clutching at anything to

soften his fall, seized in a grip of despair the satin skirts of Mrs. Raggett's best dress.

There was a second sound of rending, so close as to be almost part of the first, and Mr. Maiden, the smile of the bringer of good news frozen on his lips, found himself confronting Joe Raggett with his mouth full of blue pinstripe worsted; Stanley Wilkins prostrate, yelping, and exposed; and Mrs. Raggett a model of plump correctitude—from the waist upwards.

However, before he could offer any tactful remark Mrs. Raggett clapped a hand to her head.

"Oh dear! my Gladys!" she exclaimed and, leaving the group without apology, ran quickly to the well.

Mr. Maiden watched with a sense of irritation as she wound earnestly at the handle. He could not but feel that her absorption in this household task at this moment was inconsequential. She would be better employed in making herself decent, he thought, as her efforts accentuated her rakish appearance.

"Oh, I can't," he heard her exclaim to herself.

As if in answer, a hollow voice lamented, "*Oh Mum!*"

Mrs. Raggett resumed her winding. Mr. Maiden's impatience with the lady increased. It was not until he saw the gay legs of Gladys hoisted into splendid view that he appreciated the importance of Mrs. Raggett's preoccupation.

It was at this point that he decided to put on his hat and depart. The well-meaning sunshine still bathed the trim garden with warm light. Drowsy birds cheeped in the shade of the creeper. The tidy lawn, the crowded flower borders glowed with soothing colour. But the repose of the rustic setting served only to set off the bizarre tableau.

Joe Raggett was glaring in astonishment, still spitting out fragments of shoddy worsted. Stanley Wilkins, now winded, was lying prone, the large deficiency of cloth in the seat of his trousers giving him a carnival appearance. Mrs. Raggett was advancing towards them, wringing her hands, and crying, "I can't undo the knot."

Mr. Maiden, with natural chivalry, gazed fixedly beyond her; but, unhappily, only to find himself staring stupidly at the wrong end of Gladys, superb, vibrant, inverted. Her lamentations, resounding from the dripping depths, sounded, he thought, like those of an abandoned calf.

Mr. Raggett caught him confidentially by the arm. "Have you seen the snapdragons?" he asked in a gallant attempt to restore sanity. Mr. Maiden hadn't, of course. But it was not a moment for conventional small talk. He went, a little haughtily, without even paying his respects to the ladies.

He stalked, trembling a little at the recollection, down the white lane where overhanging poplars threw black bars of shade. He did not hear the blackbirds' fleeing chatter. He did not heed the shouted greetings of his village neighbours. Erect, red of face, firm of tread, he went his way.

As he told his wife, as soon as he was safely back in the schoolhouse, " It's not *my* feelings, my dear. But such ribald spectacles are so bad for the village. There are too many things laughed at in Lashings Episcopi already."

Mrs. Maiden sat down suddenly in a chair and laughed herself. " Well, take off your hat, dear," she said.

Mr. Maiden did. It was a saucy little boater with an upturned brim and the bunches of red cherries still clustered round the crown of it.

IN NEXT MONTH'S ARGOSY

adventure

EDWARD LINDALL, well known for his exciting stories of Australia and New Guinea, takes you far into the outback

humour

a gay new story by JAMES NORMAN all about an enchanting elephant whose heart was lighter than her hide

horror

flats to let aren't always comfortable; THEODORA BENSON tells of a particularly spine-chilling one

suspense

ancient temples and buried treasure—all the colour and excitement of the mysterious East in a tense new drama by JOHN KRUSE

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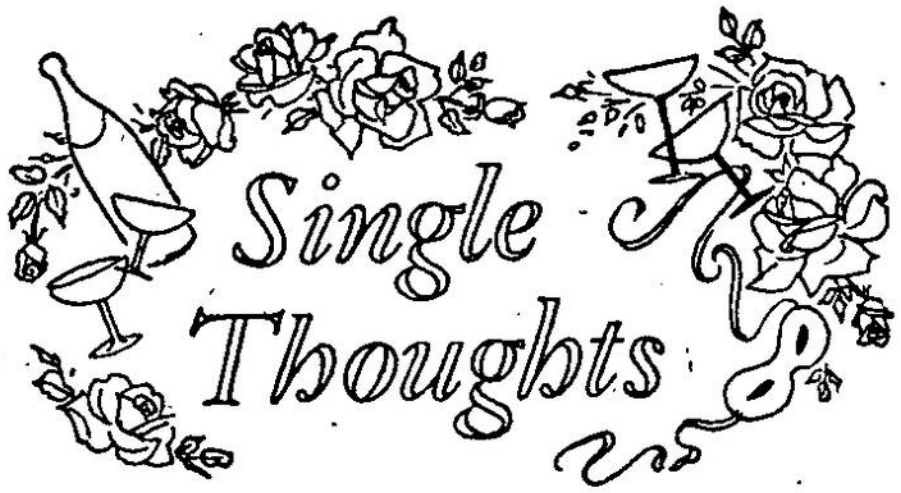


I bowed my bonnet very low
To let her know my meaning.
She answered with a courteous smile,
Her looks they were engaging.

Now twenty guineas I've in my purse,
And twenty more that's yearly,
You need not to go the market town,
For I'll buy all your barley.

If twenty guineas would gain the heart,
Of the maid that I love so dearly,
All for to tarry with me one night,
And go home in the morning early.

The Maid that Sold her Barley
Irish Ballad, 18th century

Wet Roses and Champagne

The young girl looked around the room with a contented face. Here in the light of my lamp I could see how she really looked. She had soft brown curls and blue eyes. Her face was round, with a broad forehead.

She was wonderfully pretty and graceful. I think that I just wondered at her, as one would wonder at finding a fresh bunch of roses in a gutter . . . I pulled off her hat, lifted her face up, and kissed her.

Then I felt how wet she was. She must have walked for a long time on the streets in the rain . . . With her red cheeks and shining eyes she looked like a child that has just awakened from sleep, or like a doll.

She drank half the glass of wine quite slowly, with her eyes on my face, and, as if this half-glass of champagne had brought her to a point where she could no longer be silent, she started to sing,

in a low, gentle voice, hardly moving her lips, the first lines of a song, a waltz, which was then sung in all the music halls. She broke it off, emptied her glass, and handed it back to me. *A votre santé*, she said.

Her voice was so merry, so pure, like the song of a bird in a bush, and of all things music at that time went most directly to my heart. Her song increased the feeling I had, that something special and more than natural had been sent to me. I filled her glass again, put my hand on her round white neck, and brushed the damp ringlets back from her face.

" How on earth have you come to be so wet, Nathalie? " I said, as if I had been her grandmother. " You must take off your clothes and get warm."

As I spoke my voice changed. I began to laugh again.

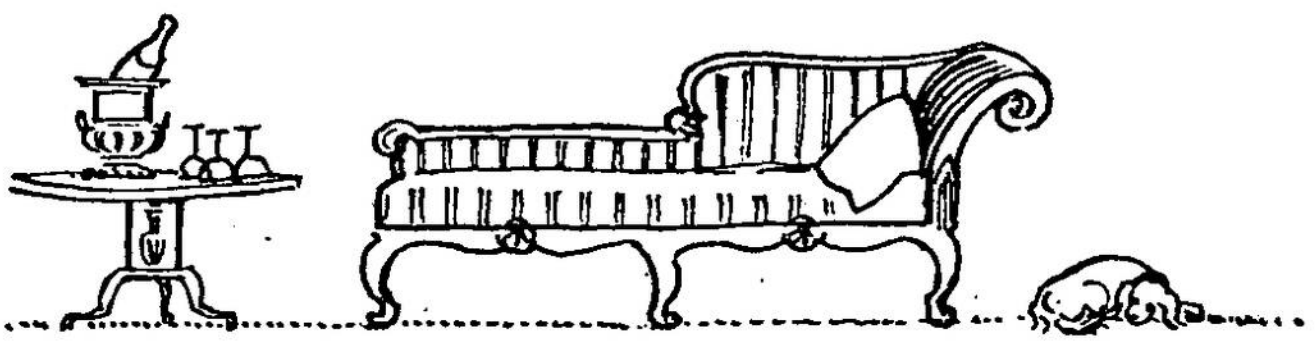
ISAK DINESEN, *The Old Chevalier*

Good Haul

One night she came to my bedside
As I lay fast asleep,
She laid her head upon my bed
And she began to weep.
She sighed, she cried, she damn near died,
She said, What shall I do?
So I hauled her into bed, and I covered up her head,
Just to keep her from the foggy, foggy dew.

Oh, I am a bachelor, I live with my son
And we work at the weaver's trade,
And every, every time I look into his eyes
He reminds me of that fair young maid.
He reminds me of the winter-time,
And of the summer too,
And of the many, many times I held her in my arms,
Just to keep her from the foggy, foggy dew.

The Foggy, Foggy Dew



Cheerful Discourse

So he (the King) set strong men upon Peredur who seized him and cast him into prison. And the maiden went before her father, and asked him wherefore he had caused the youth from Arthur's Court to be imprisoned. "In truth," he answered, "he shall not be free to-night, nor tomorrow, nor the day following, and he shall not come from where he is."

She replied not to what the King had said, but she went to the youth. "Is it unpleasant to thee to be here?" said she.

"I should not care if I were not," he replied.

"Thy couch and thy treatment shall be in no wise inferior to that of the King himself, and thou shalt have the best entertainment that the palace affords. And if it were more pleasing to thee that my couch should be here, that I might discourse with thee, it should be so, cheerfully."

"That can I not refuse," said Peredur. And he remained in prison that night. And the maiden provided all that she had promised him.

THE MABINOGION,
Translated by Lady Charlotte Guest

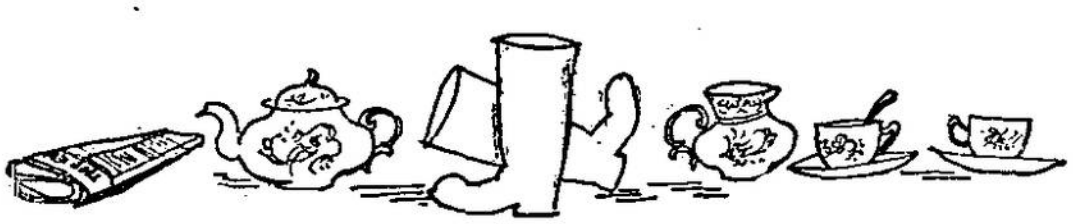
Falling Off

My true love wears Wellingtons that shine on her feet
She paddles through the puddles and she wades through the sleet
But if we get married we'll live far from here
In a land where it's summer for twelve months in the year.

My love has a bicycle with speeds one two three
And the night she fell off it was a happy night for me
There'll be no more falling off though if she becomes my bride
For we'll live where the cycle-tracks are ninety feet wide.

My true love and I we can never agree
Over whose turn it is to make the early morning tea
But if we get married we are moving away
To a land where the night-time lasts all through the day.

ROSIE LEE, *My True Love Wears Wellingtons*



NIGHT CLUB IN RENO

That husky voice, the blue spot—
it was every smoky dive in the world

BY MICHAEL FOSTER

A SQUARE of sunlight, like the page of April torn off the calendar, lay on the worn hotel carpet while Nick stirred up a couple of short drinks, with ice cubes out of a paper carton from the corner drugstore. Laurie sat very still on the arm of a chair. Her feet were in the square of sunlight, and she had on blue shoes.

" How about taking one to your mother? " Nick said.

" Yes," Laurie said. " I think a long one for her. Poor Mother."

He poured the drink into a taller glass, and then stepped into the bathroom to fill it up with water from the tap. He hoped it might bring a little comfort, at the end of this day, to the hidden woman down the hall.

Waiting for the water to run mountain-snow cold, he turned his head slowly and looked over his shoulder. His room in this old hotel on a Reno back street was a sitting-room by day, with his narrow bachelor bed folded up out of sight behind a door. It was shabby and poor-respectable, and from the window you could see the western hills.

Laurie remained very still on the arm of the chair, looking down at the fading patch of sunlight on the carpet. She had on a careless little felt hat, pulled low on one side, so now he couldn't see much of her face, only the clean hard line of youth from cheek-bone to chin, and the softness of her mouth. When she wasn't saying anything, her mouth looked frightened.

Nick came back, carefully carrying her mother's glass, and said, " Listen, Laurie, take it easy. You're doing all right."

Almost imperceptibly, she shook her head. She wasn't looking at him.

He waited a minute and then went out. He carried the glass down the hall to the room where Laurie and her mother lived, knocked, and said, " It's Nick."

The door opened wide; not cautiously enough for a woman who was in hiding.

" Oh Nick, how pleasant of you," Judith Camlin murmured.

Nick went in, closing the door behind him. " You think anybody's spotted you? " he said abruptly. " Anybody? "

She stood with her hands on her hips, looking distantly amused. She was at the top—a star of the New York theatre, a great name above rainy pavements, and a curtain whispering upwards, in a breathing hush that was waiting for her voice.

" Well, the only anybody I've talked to is the porter. The old, nervous, fat one, late at night, when I come in from my walk. And he still calls me Mrs. McKechnie, without suspicion. Isn't that a brilliant idea for a name? Mrs. McKechnie."

Watching her with the sad clearness of the young, wondering how older and successful people got themselves into such jams, Nick said, " Well, right now is probably the worst patch."

" Until the windy night I die," she smiled, " with the rain crawling on a black window-pane. I've been thinking about that too. But lightly. Always think lightly about that, Nick."

The lovely careless drawl of her voice, making an understatement of death itself, told you why she was a fine and very modern actress. Even broke, and in fear, she somehow gave this drab room an air.

" Well, if the going gets any tougher," Nick said slowly, " I can—I can help. A little."

" You're very sweet, Nick," she said. " And very young." Her voice roughened ever so little. " And Laurie's one of my worries, too, Nick."

Quietly, he watched her. It was still a wonder to him—kind of an awe—that he should ever see Judith Camlin as close as this, and be able to talk to her. And here she was: vulnerable, relying upon Laurie, and in some ways pretending to her own self.

Gently he said, " Don't worry about Laurie. Leave that to me."

" But," Judith said, " I can't help worrying. She's a pleasant child."

Nick fumbled for a cigarette, and then stood looking at it instead of lighting it. He knew the long hard roads of another way of show business, and he could not ask Laurie to travel those roads with him.

" Try your drink," he said mildly. " Laurie and I have to go to work."

She lifted her glass to him, giving him her slow, faint smile.

He went back to his own room, and Laurie was standing in the middle of the floor, powdering her nose. Her hand was

unsteady, and Nick came over from the door and wiped a streak of powder from under one of her eyes with a corner of his handkerchief. He patted her shoulder and she nodded, her lips parting slightly. They turned away from each other shyly, to pick up their drinks.

Laurie was not quite nineteen, and they spent their working-nights watching the rougher follies of a rough town. They had known each other nearly two weeks.

" Mother's getting restless," Laurie said. " She walks up and down the room all day, smoking cigarettes. It's a sign. And she's so careless. She's going to end up by being recognized around here, if she doesn't watch out. And then all her hiding won't have done any good."

" Never mind about your mother. Hullo, Laurie," Nick said softly.

" Hullo, Nick," she answered.

And for them, this cheap hotel on a back street was not just a creaking and dusty place where you stayed for a time because you were poor. It was a place for each of them to remember gently when they were old, no matter what other people and places and chances of life might come, in between.

With quiet, lingering hands they put their glasses back on the table. They avoided glancing at each other again.

Nick's old crock of a car with its California number-plates was parked across the street. As he swung it out from the kerb, with Laurie sitting silently beside him, Nick was even more bitterly and hopelessly conscious of the hard roads of his kind of show business. Time was, not long ago, when they were adventure to him, in this clattering jaloppy—long western miles, and mountains in the sun.

But now they were miles he would have to travel alone, and mountains that Laurie would never see; and towns—maybe years of towns—ahead, where the music would say only that Laurie was far away somewhere in her own better world.

But just for these evenings, just for now, it was springtime along the little river that sings on its stones through Reno. Driving, Nick could feel Laurie's secret and inwardly trembling fear of the noisy, merciless evening ahead.

" Oh Laurie," he said. And because his own voice suddenly sounded shy and helpless, he said harshly, " This is no life for you. I'm glad it's not for long."

" How about yourself? "

" That's different. I'm O.K. here." Already he was part of Reno's nights. Reno adopts her wanderers quickly.

The place where they worked was a tough, third-rate night club, off the main road. Nick parked the jaloppy on the sparsely gravelled lot. The orchestra was playing soft dinner music, and there was a fair-sized crowd at the bar. The gambling tables were going pretty well.

Nick watched Laurie go down the stairs to the dressing-room she shared with a couple of other girls, and then he went out to the back steps to have a cigarette.

The chef came out from the kitchen to join him, with a half-smoked cigarette stuck on his lower lip.

After a while he said, " Heard Leo mention your girl."

Nick took a long, careful pull at his own cigarette. Leo was the owner of the club. Letting the smoke dribble out, he asked, " What did he say? "

" He said she was a nice girl, but he said she didn't belt out a song big enough for a smoky dive like this."

" O.K.," Nick said. " Thanks, Tex."

" Just a passing mention. Leo said she was a real refined-type girl."

Nick listened to the orchestra working at loud-beating intervals with the first act of the dinner show, a spruce and gauntly desperate old comedian. When the music beat up extra big for his exit and then shaded off into a dreamy theme, Nick threw away his cigarette and went on.

His small white show piano, crusted with glitter and edged with gilt, had been rolled out on its invisible rubber-tyred wheels. It waited on the cramped, dingy floor under the orchestra stand. When the amber spotlight came on it, Nick Moran walked out and sat down. His piano, talking clear, came in with the orchestra on the final fading-out bars of the theme, and then, as the boys on the stand turned out their lights and got up to sneak out through the back curtain, the piano went on alone with a slow succession of dim minor chords falling towards the singing bass.

Something about his act, maybe just the change, somehow stopped most of the chatter at the tables. Pulling the watch-sized microphone nearer his face, Nick leaned forward and went into the first of his Monodramas with Piano—The One-man Theatre of the Keyboard.

Sure, it was corny, and it was sent out on tour by a low-grade agency in Hollywood, and he was twenty-three, and over the roads he hauled the little white-and-gilt piano lashed up in a tarpaulin on a second-hand, two-wheeled trailer hitched on to the jaloppy. But his speaking voice was low, uninsistent, and it carried.

For his first number here, because it came right after a comedy

act, he used one of his dramatic monologues called *Now that We've Said Everything*, which ended with a whispered line that travelled to the farthest dark corner of this joint.

Nick had been soaked in music, the atmosphere of professional music, all his life. But he knew he could be a better actor than orchestra pianist. Maybe nobody else thought so, but he did. He was living poor because every pay day he sent all but hotel-room-and-hamburger money to make things decent for his father, who was an invalid in a Brooklyn nursing home.

Nick went into his second number, a reasonably bawdy bit about a gloomily confidential night-club owner telling his troubles, with long blues-filled pauses between the growls of voice. He saw Laurie watching him from the performers' curtained entrance. She was dressed, ready for her turn.

He also saw Leo standing in the gambling-room archway, smoking a cigarette, his hand covering a steely grin. This number always went well with the customers, and Leo usually drifted in from somewhere to catch it; because Nick was ad-libbing the weary, tough mannerisms of Leo's own voice, and faking up something new every night.

It was underlined with a faint absent-minded savagery tonight, for he was thinking about Laurie. He knew what it would mean if she lost this job too soon. He thought about Judith Camlin cooking a lonely supper on the electric plate they had smuggled in. Show business is full of weird shifts and muffled hullabaloos, of alarums and excursions, but this was the weirdest.

Judith Camlin was here to get a divorce, her third, but that was not the reason she was hiding. In fact, when she first arrived in Reno three weeks ago, she had a suite in one of the luxury hotels on the river, and there she had given charming interviews to the papers. While Laurie, with her heart in her throat, went looking for a job—under her own name, Laurie Gordon, which nobody would possibly connect with her mother's name. Leo gave her a chance here in this club, and here Nick met her one night, shadow-shy in the performers' corridor.

Judith Camlin was broke, and for business reasons she didn't dare to show it or let anybody of importance know. But after Nick had taken Laurie to and from work three or four nights in the jaloppy, they told him how things stood. And very late one night Judith and Laurie slipped out of the big hotel and over to the cheap one where Nick lived.

Judith had established her front in the luxury hotel, and its manager was an old friend of her second husband—all inquirers were told that Mrs. Camlin was in seclusion and was not to be disturbed. Laurie picked up her post every afternoon. A few

long-distance calls were switched to Room 422 in the cheap hotel.

Judith Camlin had the most important contract of her life coming up with Joseph Thal, that grandest and most unpleasantly cultured figure of the theatre, but it wasn't signed yet. Under this pending contract, Judith Camlin was to become an actress-manager, with full power in her own company. Beginning with a stunning play she had found, by a new young Austrian.

" Actress-manager. My own company. It's my big throw at fortune," Judith said. " And if Thal knew I needed money—well, you don't know Thal. Merciless, merciless—in the most sensitive, artistic way. I'd get the contract, all right—but my dear, the terms! And I'd have to take them. It's only because he thinks I'm coolly independent that I can dictate."

From Laurie, Nick knew of her lavish, automatic generosity to anybody who needed it or wanted it—" A snowstorm of cheques. Ever since I can remember." Her appallingly bad investments, usually in businesses run by friends, or their husbands, or husbands' friends; her wide-hearted, easy way of living. And her flawlessly clear hard work.

With nearly the last of her current money, she paid the rent ahead on her expensive New York apartment before buying plane tickets to Reno. " In this frenzied world," Judith said briskly, "you must keep up a front. Certainly if you're dealing with somebody like Thal." So here in Reno, Laurie's slender night-club pay packet not only helped out on room rent and groceries, it also paid some bills that Judith had forgotten in New York.

Tonight, when Laurie went on for her turn with the orchestra, Nick slipped into a dim corner to one side of the stand, where she would not notice him with the spotlight in her eyes. She came in on a soft beat, with a dry click in her throat. The coldly glittering microphone caught it and you could hear it.

After that, her voice steadied, low and pure. Too low, too pure. The knives and forks and gabble of the diners kept right on. Nick had listened often before, but tonight he didn't want to listen any more.

She was slim and golden in her blue evening dress, and her voice had a lovely childish catch as it seemed to stroll with a couple of violins, but she didn't know how to punch it out to snake-eye a noisy dive like this. Nick went away and sat on the back steps.

When they left after the one-o'clock show, Laurie walked with her head half bowed, and Nick didn't say anything either. But at the slam of the car door she smiled at him, hardly more than a trembling shadow brushing her lips, and they drove up to the main road and back into town.

In the lobby of the hotel the old fat night porter slid their keys across the desk. "Mrs. McKechnie hasn't come in from her walk yet," he said.

He took them up in the lift, and they went along the corridor. Laurie bent over her door knob to put her key in. It made uncertain metallic scratchings around the lock, and she bent a fraction closer to try again. And suddenly the key with its numbered brown tag fell with a tiny clank to the scuffed carpet, and Laurie was straightening up and turning slowly to face Nick, and they were looking at each other.

And for them, all the clocks in the world stopped for a minute because Laurie closed her eyes. Her lips were cool and soft, but Nick would always remember that the first time he ever touched them, they slowly and silently became wet with tears.

They heard the lift door. But too late. As they stepped quickly apart, Judith was strolling towards them along the corridor, coming in from her solitary walk along the dark river. Almost imperceptibly, she raised her eyebrows at them and glanced at the key on the floor.

"Well, well," she said with perfect courtesy.

And she unlocked the door, stepped over the fallen key, and went in. The click of the closing door was too quiet.

"That tears it," Laurie muttered. "When mother becomes very careful—Oh Nick, Nick!"

"Yes, Laurie," Nick said steadily.

Yet, the next afternoon, Laurie had to admit: "She didn't say a thing when I went in and got ready for bed. She put on a most peaceful act of pretending to be asleep . . . Well, she did say one thing, darling. She pretended to half-wake up and said, 'Wash your face in cold water. Your eyes are swollen. I found when I was younger than you,' she said, 'that cold water helps.' Oh Nick," Laurie said forlornly.

"Yeah," Nick said. "You carry her drink to her this afternoon. With me, she might not pretend to be asleep."

That night, halfway through his first number, he spotted Judith Camlin among the dark haze of faces beyond the top of the glittering white-and-gilt piano. She was sitting at a table in a dark corner. With a soft-brimmed felt hat pulled low—a hat that made you think of country roads and the rain—and her dark hair pinned back, she was an anonymous woman sitting alone.

Through her cigarette smoke, she was listening to Nick more than watching him, and he gave her no way of knowing that he had recognized her. At the final bitter whisper of *Now that We've Said Everything*, she stubbed out her cigarette. And

through his routine about a night-club owner, she watched the faces around her, not so much when they laughed, but when they glanced at one another and turned to listen again.

Nick finished, nodded amiably to the ringside tables, and walked off. But this time he was behind the silvery curtains at the back of the bandstand when Laurie came on with the orchestra, and this time he was studying Judith Camlin through his own cigarette smoke.

Laurie, beautiful and shy in her blue dress, having to take the spotlight in her eyes, the band beating gently—and Judith Camlin's slow anger as she looked around with cold eyes at the unheeding faces. And then, after a while, a slower, deeper anger of another kind as she sat staring into her empty coffee cup. Nick left her to think it out for herself, and went out to the back steps.

Tex, the chef, stuck his head apologetically from the kitchen door. " Not good news," he said.

" My girl? "

" Heard Leo growling around," Tex said. " Seems as though her two weeks is up tomorrow, being a Thursday. Leo mentioned the fact in my hearing."

Nick turned and went in and walked straight through the club to Leo's office. " I hear you're going to let Laurie go," he said.

Leo looked up from his desk. " Oh—Laurie Gordon." Leo's eyes, pale gambler's eyes, hardly ever blinked. You got used to it after a while.

" See if your heart's beating tonight, Leo. She's helping her mother through some pretty bad times."

" Lots of girls help their mothers. Some sing louder."

" She's got a good voice, Leo."

" Well, maybe good, but—Now, if she could dance, maybe . . ."

" She doesn't dance. Not that way," Nick said coldly. " Look, Leo, I'll play the band piano for her act, and I'll sell them her songs with a kick that'll knock you over."

" Skip it." Leo's mouth never softened, but it could suggest a companionable leer. " O.K., O.K.," he said wearily. " For you, Nick, she can have another two weeks if that'll help."

Nearer than the click and drone of gambling, they heard a woman delicately clear her throat. Judith Camlin was lounging in the door.

" I followed you, Nick," she said, and looked at Leo. " I'll take my daughter's place."

" Who are you? " Leo sighed.

" Judith Camlin," she said calmly.

Leo started to smile politely, as if at an inexpert gag, and then

he stared more closely at her face, suddenly remembering the newspaper interviews. " My God! " he said.

To Nick, she said, " That frightened child! I didn't know." One of her hands fumbled awkwardly with her purse, and it was strange to think of her fumbling anything.

" I don't like myself for this," she said. " And you've known that Laurie has been terrified, every minute of it, and you've been her friend. I—she had a walk-on part with me last summer, in her college vacation, but a New York theatre is very different from a place like this. And besides, she doesn't care at all for the stage, in our way. Maybe she's seen too much of my life. She wants to be a costume designer. She belongs on some creative side of our world, Nick, far from this sort of thing."

" I know," Nick said quietly.

To Leo, she said, " I'll go on as the last act of your show. Scene from an old play of mine, years ago. Put a bare wooden table on the floor. Two chairs, the older and more knocked about the better. A bottle. One glass to begin with, and another when I signal the waiter. Give me a blue spot. That's all I need. And no microphone . . . You, Nick, you go and sit down at the table with your back to the blue light. That's all you have to do. Pretty soon I'll come along."

" I've had to improvise in worse spots," Nick said.

" Why, of course," she said. " Most of your acts are ad-libbing, aren't they? "

After studying her face a long time, Leo said, " Want me to take the mike and make a special announcement from the floor? "

" No. We'll try it cold and nameless," Judith Camlin said. " I'm curious."

" O.K.," he said. " I'm curious, too."

As Nick showed Judith the way to the back of the club, Laurie was nowhere in sight. She had gone down to the basement dressing-room, and a dance team was just leaving the floor.

In the performers' corridor, Nick said, " It isn't as if this was one of the big spots even. This is a tough dive off the main road. You're going to be playing in the dregs of show business. For pin-money. Your friend Thal will have a seizure. This is going to mean ruin to you, you know."

" Very well," Judith said serenely. " Ruin, then."

As the pair of acrobatic dancers squeezed past them, panting, Judith pulled her hat to a steep slant. At that angle, it became rakish, tough as the joint itself. With her lipstick, she sketched in her mouth, big and loose, and she powdered the rest of her face to a vicious, dead pallor. Her eyes became darkly enormous. But more subtly than that, her whole face changed and took on

a waiting expression. Somebody had hurriedly told the orchestra that they were to bring on a new dramatic act unrehearsed, and they were making a loud routine build-up.

Nick walked out and sat down. Leo had ordered the house lights to be dimmed almost to darkness, and the blue spotlight made the bare wooden tabletop a funny sick colour, with his shadow across it. Nick dropped one hand and the music died away. He sat there alone in the middle of a puzzled hush.

And then Judith Camlin had come into the light, and stopped at the table, looking down at him. He had known what the blue spot would do to her face, and still he was startled.

It was the most defiantly, toughly tragic face he had ever seen. And beautiful—terribly beautiful. And lost.

When she raised her eyebrows inquiringly, he made a brief gesture to match that face, and she sat down on the other chair. They lit cigarettes and sat looking at each other sullenly, pulling the silence out and yet farther out. And then she began to talk.

With her first husky lines, Nick knew how far he had to go to become anything like a great actor. In that first minute and a half, so close to her, he heard the years of a thoughtful mind at work. Which could play damnation, because some thoughtful minds know that too.

And on that slow voice alone, across a bare table, everybody in the place was suddenly in the smokiest of smoky dives—maybe a cellar honky-tonk somewhere, or a waterfront saloon—it was every rough joint in the world.

And Judith was a woman who had been cast off by a younger man. As soon as Nick got the drift, he began answering her leads curtly, with a quiet snarl in his throat, and he, too, was playing it from watching the sins of the world these many nights, but sometimes his throat clamped. Without moving her lips, Judith said in an undertone, "You're O.K., Nick. When you can't think of anything to say—don't say anything. I'll carry."

She was using the place itself as a set, and the crowded, shadowy people at the tables around them became themselves a silent company backing up the scene. A bottle clinked absent-mindedly, a man coughed with a nervous throat. The gambling-room archway was crowded, and the doorway from the bar.

As the scene rose in pitch, Nick, on his own instincts of showmanship, glanced at Johnny, the orchestra pianist. Johnny was show-smart, and his wondering face signalled back, "O.K., boy," so Nick cued him with one hand hanging loosely over the edge of the table. The piano came in with dim sultry chords, making background mood, trying to be like Nick's own piano. Then one muted violin came in, and very softly, a trumpet.

Judith nodded, and Nick himself, caught and swept along with something bigger than he had ever known—power, power—Nick was playing bigger and more quietly than he had ever thought he could. And all his life he would remember Judith Camlin's undertone to him through almost motionless lips, " Play to me—play to me. Fake any line. I'll pick it up. I'll carry."

When the woman of the scene finished her last bitter drink with the man she had lost, and blindly tried to put her glass down, but missed the edge of the table so the glass crashed on the floor, the whole room crashed with it—hands and voices, and Nick signalling the orchestra for music in lieu of a curtain.

The performers' corridor was crowded with awed faces, the tired faces of the hard roads, and Laurie wasn't there, but Leo was. Some of the audience were standing, and pretty soon they all were, and they called Judith and Nick back four times.

In the corridor Leo said, " Can I put ads in the papers? Your name? "

" Why not? I'm going to be here," Judith said. She turned her head to smile faintly at Nick. " With three shows a night, we'd better work up two more scenes. Tomorrow morning. We'll give 'em a two-player repertory, Nick."

When Nick stumbled out to the back steps, Laurie was waiting there, and they stood clinging to each other.

" Yes, dear," Laurie said. " I told you—when Mother becomes very careful, all hell breaks loose."

The second show went even better, because Nick knew the routine, and at the end of that one a reporter was waiting in the corridor. " Leo phoned me," he said.

Nick knew him, and he also knew that he was the trusted Reno talent-spotter of Max Felder, the New York columnist of show business. But he did not tell Judith. The damage was already done, and nothing could help. He beat it out to the back steps and Laurie again, and he did not tell Laurie, either. Tomorrow was time enough for the debacle.

The next evening, when the three of them drove out in Nick's jaloppy, the parking-lot was already crowded with cars, and the club was doing a bigger-than-downtown business. As they edged along between the packed bar and the gambling tables, a barman waved a handful of telegrams at them.

Dazed, Nick received four of them. They were all from agents, offering him night-club bookings, two in New York. That was all right for him, but—Judith was calmly opening one of hers. She motioned to Nick and he came and read over her shoulder.

It was very long and expensive, three pages, and it quoted Max Felder's column of that afternoon in New York:

Last night an anonymous woman walked onto the floor of a murky night spot outside Reno. And for twenty minutes this woman, with an unknown young actor, played to a drinking, gambling crowd, and knocked them sideways with pure theatre—big theatre—the topmost theatre there is. For the anonymous woman was our own Judith Camlin, and she taught once more a sometimes forgotten lesson: that greatness is greatness no matter where it works, or even if it works nameless.

The column went on for quite a length, before it ended:

Somewhere, Judith Camlin has unearthed a young actor, very fine, very restrained, with a tough power that played right back to Judith Camlin at her most powerful. His name is Nick Moran. Always remember that I am the one who told you about him first.

Judith's next telegram was shorter, and it was signed THAL.

" My dear, you are even smarter than we thought. A publicity smash. Two news magazines want spreads of pictures. Radio tonight. Am announcing contract to press. Your terms. Suggest you plan to put this Nick Moran under contract quickly. Love, from me to you, you astonishing gambler."

And only Nick and Laurie, and maybe Leo, knew that she had done it for next week's rent and groceries. And for Laurie. She had thrown away her poor front, with an open heart, and had made a greater front. On the back of Thal's telegram, she scribbled her reply, and showed it to Nick.

" Dear Joseph, You have said nothing in your entire wire that was not taken for granted, including Nick Moran. He will be a member of my—repeat, my—opening company. Love, Judith."

Laurie's hand was on Nick's sleeve. Judith saw it, and silent-laughter lines appeared at the corners of her eyes.

" All right," she said. " The back steps. But I saw the cook watching over you, too, last night. He shooed me away with a dignified glance. You'd better tell him that you're engaged and that I'm part of the family."

★ ★ ★

THE HAT

I love my beautiful hat more than anything
And through my beautiful hat I see a wedding ring
The King will marry me and make me his own before all
And when I am married I shall wear my hat and walk
on the palace wall.

STEVIE SMITH, *Harold's Leap*

SILENT HOSTAGES

The killer's thin mouth curled
—this was a prize he had not expected

BY PAUL GALLICO

THE car carrying the two escaped killers, Wylie Rickman and Art Hoser, nosed carefully into the unidentified Nevada desert town, its headlights burning blindingly. It was that darkest hour before dawn of a moonless, starlit night.

Rickman, who was driving—small, dapper, with cold, saurian eyes and bloodless mouth—judged it to be Parumph in lower Nevada. Somehow they had missed the Fairbank Ranch in the dark.

Ever since they had murdered their three hostages, the woman and her twins, and shot their way out of Beatty, north-west of Yucca Flat, they had been attempting to find their way southwards towards the Mexican border, twisting and turning, driving without lights on back roads and wagon trails, avoiding the glow of towns, fighting the panic of the hunted.

A few hours back they had listened to a news bulletin that caused them to change their plans and begin searching for a settlement that the alarm might not yet have reached. They desperately needed fresh hostages.

Now they carefully approached a short main street between the small cluster of buildings that mushroomed abruptly out of the desert.

The two men were jumpy, nervous, half drugged by fatigue, and deadly dangerous.

Fat Art Hoser, who had needlessly killed the policeman the day after they had escaped from the prison at Carson City, had turned into a vengeful jelly of cowardice, for he knew what happened to cop-killers. Rickman was even more vicious, for he murdered in cold blood, and was prepared to sacrifice a human life for every extended hour of his own if necessary. He was aware that if daylight found them without a shield of living flesh they were finished.

The town apparently rose early, for many of the buildings were blazing with lights. But this was not surprising. Life in desert communities frequently began before sunrise.

Caught in their headlights, the tall saguaras cacti, which with the stunted greasewood shrubs and sage-brush grew right to the edge of the town, pointed aloft like warning fingers. But as yet there seemed to be no one abroad in the street.

They passed the usual petrol station on the outskirts. Rickman drove cautiously, his Magnum .38 on the seat at his left side. Two rifles and a submachine-gun were between his partner and himself. Hoser had a double-barrelled shotgun resting on his lap across his fat legs and beer belly.

A sedan with its engine running was standing by the pumps. Inside, they spotted the white-overalled attendant with another man, apparently giving him his change. It reminded Hoser of the garage hand, a mere boy, they had killed and robbed near Tonopah. Rickman thought only of the hostage he wanted. A woman, preferably with another kid or kids.

As they moved by, Rickman sought to assess the buildings of the town. There seemed to be a two-storey brick hotel, a general store, some shops, a livery stable, several frame houses, a café, the usual residential buildings, and at the end of the town a small power-station with what appeared to be a tall radio mast next to it.

A lounger was apparently asleep on the porch of the hotel, chair leaned back, shovel-shaped Stetson tilted over his eyes. A ranch wagon was parked in front of it and a rancher sat at the wheel. Hoser nervously moved the shotgun. Rickman picked up his gun and said savagely, " You shoot again before I tell you to, and you'll get this across the bridge of your nose."

It was Hoser's nervous and wanton shooting of a policeman after they had escaped from the prison that had prematurely started the hue and cry at their heels.

They drove quickly by. The rancher did not even bother to turn his head.

Glimpsed through a grimy window, the café appeared to be full, with the counter attendant at his hot-plate and the waitress serving coffee across the bar. A juke-box bawled from the restaurant. An asphalt-carrying truck and a big freighter with trailer were drawn up in front, their drivers apparently breakfasting inside.

As they drove on, voices emerged from several of the houses where radios had been turned on by early risers. In a nearby house a telephone was ringing, and there was a thumping noise of some kind of pump or engine. A window a few houses down showed a family seated at early breakfast. It seemed as though only the first rays of the sun were wanted to send the inhabitants of the town spilling out onto the street and about their business.

They passed a big sedan parked in front of a frame house where

the blinds were up, revealing the occupants. A man in trousers and shirt with his braces hanging down was shaving himself in front of a cabinet mirror. In the kitchen, a woman in an apron was bending over a mixing-bowl. There was no one in the living-room, from which the radio was playing loudly, but in an adjoining bedroom they caught a glimpse of a cot with a girl of five or six asleep on it and a crib in which there was a baby.

Rickman's thin mouth curled with satisfaction. This was a prize he had not expected. With the baby they might even reach the border. And there were keys, he noted, in the ignition switch of the sedan. The car they had taken from the salesman they had shot between Tonopah and Goldfield was marked.

Hours before, they had sat in the vehicle, lights and motor shut off, and, concealed by a fold in the foothills miles from anywhere, listened to a news bulletin from Las Vegas, which was largely devoted to the harrowing story of the murder trail of the two escaped convicts.

And a mile away, a man sitting in a shack by a gate in a barbed-wire fence, sick and clammy, listened to the same broadcast over a portable radio, the beads of sweat running from his cheeks and temples as the announcer gave the details: " As the chase spread out down the highway from Beatty, the bandits firing from their car, police did not dare to shoot for fear of hitting Mrs. Nellie Bassett and her twins, Tina and Joey, aged seven, kidnapped as hostages an hour earlier by the runaway pair.

" Apparently, when police, braving the fire, attempted to force the fleeing car off the road, Rickman or Hoser, or both, shot the mother and two children, threw the bodies from the car, and escaped as the pursuit ground to a horrified halt. The children were dead, but Nellie Bassett was still alive and was rushed to the hospital in a critical condition . . ."

The man in the shack fought and lost his battle between duty and instinct, switched off his portable, got into his car, and drove off to the north. The sound of his motor and the glow of his headlights caused the two killers to finger their weapons apprehensively, until the noise and the beam of the headlights faded in the distance. Then they had listened to the details of the police dragnet set for them across three states.

" We gotta get us another hostage. The Fairbank Ranch ought to be where that car came from. There'd be women there."

Driving blacked-out, they crept to the place from which the vanished car appeared to have come. The rutty road continued on the other side of the wire fence, which to Rickman denoted the ranch he sought. The gate was open and they drove through, past the shack and a large noticeboard. By star-glow he was

able to read the big letters, KEEP OUT. He did not want to show the light necessary to read the rest.

Hoser said, " You sure you know what you're doin'? " and then added, " I'm getting sick of all this killing."

Rickman reached over and hit him on the cheekbone with the barrel of his .38. The fat man stared down at the blood dripping onto his hand, and said nothing further. He was afraid of Rickman. They had floundered in the darkness for several hours, but found no ranch. Then, shortly before five, the lights on the horizon had announced the presence of the town in which they now found themselves.

Rickman drew up behind the parked sedan. " Shift the stuff into the car ahead and start her up," he ordered Hoser. " When she's running, come in and grab the kids. I'll take care of the other two . . ." He slid out from under the wheel with a movement that was almost obscenely sinuous, shifted the heavy .38 to his right hand, and ran into the frame house.

From the entrance hall inside the unlocked door he could see both the man shaving and, at the back, the woman at her kitchen table. He levelled his gun at the former, saying, " Don't anybody move. This is a snatch. Stay where you are. Do as I say and nobody's going to get hurt. You in the kitchen, if you open your trap, I let your husband have it."

The man in the bathroom froze obediently, motionless, his razor at the side of his cheek. The gunman could see his own face reflected over his victim's shoulder in the mirror. The woman, apparently terrorized, did not stir or utter a sound.

In the next room the radio blatted loudly. Rickman did not listen to it but was satisfied it provided cover.

Seconds ticked by. Hoser should have got the rifles, guns, ammunition, and their small stock of food transferred to the other car by now. The gunman heard the starter whir, then the sound of the engine catching and turning over with a steady beat.

He waited until he heard Hoser's footstep on the threshold and then pulled the trigger, shooting the man through the back.

Hoser rushed in, howling, " For God's sake, you crazy fool! Are you killing again? You'll have the whole town on us . . ."

For once Rickman did not turn on his partner, but stood with the already recocked pistol, staring blankly at the round hole that had appeared in the back of the man's shirt in the region of the heart. The fabric of the garment was smoking slightly but the man, oblivious of the shock of the bullet or the fact that he should be dead, remained standing.

Rickman bawled at Hoser, " Grab the two kids in the bed-

room!" Then he raised the heavy gun, aimed it at the back of the man's head, fired twice, and endured the shock of seeing his own pale and deadly image vanish as the cabinet shaving-mirror shattered under the impact of the bullets.

With two holes through his head, the man, the razor still grotesquely held at the side of his cheek, still refused to fall and die.

With a cry of rage Rickman leapt forward and brought the gun-barrel down on the fellow's skull, which split like a melon into a hundred pieces, just as Hoser came in from the bedroom, calling, "Hey! These ain't no kids. These are dolls. What's going on here?" In one hand he held the baby made of bisque, its blue china eyes open and staring innocently. By the other he dragged the mannequin of a five-year-old girl with chestnut curls.

Rickman's nerve broke. He yelled, "What the hell is this, a trap?" Berserk, he pulled over the body of the headless dummy by the broken mirror, kicked it, and knocked down the lifelike wax figure of the woman in the kitchen, swearing incoherently. Then, ignoring the shaking Hoser, he dashed through the door, pulling a heavy automatic from a shoulder holster as he did so.

But there was no police patrol car, or posse of armed citizens converging upon the house. The streets were still empty. It was beginning to grow light. In the house across the street the telephone kept ringing.

Down the block at the petrol station the customer and the attendant were still immobile at the cash-register. The lounger slept on undisturbed, tipped back in his chair on the hotel porch. None of the figures in the café had stirred. In the nearby ranch-wagon the rancher remained motionless at the wheel.

Rickman, his guns held before him, ran over, yanked the door open, and pulled at the rancher's arm. The wax figure obediently slipped out from under the wheel and fell to the ground.

The gunman suddenly became appallingly aware that for all the noise that filled the village street there was not the sound of any human voice that did not come from a radio, not a single living thing to be seen or heard. Somehow they had blundered into a settlement populated solely by department-store dummies.

And still the whole truth did not dawn.

He went back to the charnel-house of the murdered waxworks where he came upon Art Hoser kneeling in the living-room before the radio, his whole person quivering abjectly from his buttocks to his belly, chin, and lips, the sweat pouring off him in rivulets.

He did not even look up as Rickman came in, but stared transfixed at the instrument. He seemed to be praying to it as to a kind of animate responsible being, mumbling, "No, no! Please! You got to wait!"

Rickman, clutching his two guns which had decided so much for him but would never conclude anything again, focused his attention on the radio as the announcer spoke tensely.

" Everything is in readiness now: the tanks are in position three miles from ground zero; the Civil Defence workers are in their places on Media Hill. And in just exactly one minute from now, Survival City—or Doomtown as the newspapermen have called it—the guinea-pig village, peopled solely with dummies distributed throughout in attitudes of daily life, will be subjected to the disintegrating force of an atom blast twice that which levelled Hiroshima . . . Now I will pick up the time signals to zero hour: twenty seconds—nineteen—eighteen—seventeen— "

Rickman ran screaming into the empty street where in the house across the way the telephone bell was still ringing. " No, no! " he bawled. " Hey! Wait a minute! Do you hear me? You can't! We're here. For God's sake, wait! "

The last thing he saw was the steel skeleton of what he had thought was a radio mast. But now, outlined against the dawn, a dark, torpedo-shaped package hung from the top of the five-hundred-foot tower. And the last thing he heard was the unison chant from all the live radios in all the dummy-filled houses: " Five seconds—four—three—two—one— "

Some time after, the guard who that same morning had deserted his post at the No. 3 Gate of the Restricted Area between Beatty and Mercury returned alone, a half-hour before his relief was due. His name was Joseph Bassett and he was the husband of Nellie Bassett and father of the twins, Tina and Joey. He had managed to reach the bedside of his wife and hold her in his arms before she died. Dazed by the completion of the tragedy, he had returned to duty from force of habit.

Still in a state of shock, he could not cope with the ominous mystery of the tyre tracks, west to east, that crossed his post and, entering through the open gate, went straight as an arrow eastwards towards where the brown mushroom cloud of the recent explosion had begun to lose its shape and drift with the wind.

Someone had entered during his absence. He stood staring down uneasily at the tracks, wondering who it had been, what had happened to them, and what it might portend for him—if it ever came out . . .

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ARGOSY FOR H.M. FORCES

When you have read this copy of ARGOSY, why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?

STRONG MAN FROM PIRAEUS

Beans for strength, fish for sagacity and a flower for a lovely lady

BY GEORGE JOHNSTON

DIMITRI had never really been aware of the fickleness of women until the strong-man came from Piraeus.

Because he was a Greek, he had always been inclined to take women for granted: an attitude which Hollywood films have dispelled effectively from such cosmopolitan centres as Athens and Piraeus, but which is still tenaciously held by the islanders, whose cinematic appetites are sustained by occasional showings of *Birth of a Nation*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and the earlier comedies of Laurel and Hardy, with Greek subtitles.

And Dimitri was an islander. Not just another person who happened to be living on an Aegean island—a lot which may befall any spinster archaeologist from Milwaukee or scoutmaster-poet from Weston-super-Mare—but a very particular sort of islander. For Dimitri had been born and bred on a comparatively small and extremely barren rock called Kalymnos, which lies among the twelve islands of the Dodecanese group, ten miles from the coast of Anatolia and at least a million from all things sophisticated. No ripple of emancipation has yet reached this island, and its men accept the taking of women for granted almost as a matter of gospel.

Women, according to the strong and handsome Kalymnian men—and certainly to Dimitri, who was as strong and handsome as any of them—were soft and garrulous creatures who cooked food, sewed clothes, contrived patches, attended Church, washed the clothes at the public wells and the rugs on the rocks by the sea, had babies, attended to them, obeyed all the whims of their husbands, and were always there when they were wanted.

They were not permitted to smoke, nor to drink with their men in the taverns which catered for the masculine dominance of the island with vinous prodigality. In summer, if it was very hot, they could be allowed to bathe in the sea, provided they remained in areas rigidly segregated from the men, and even

then only if their bodies were enveloped in concealing fustani, which had the appearance of old-fashioned nightshirts. If they could overcome in any way at all the trammelling stricture of these floating casings, their aquatic exercises were confined to the dog-paddle, breast-stroke, or mere dunking, the overarm or Australian crawl being frowned upon as " forward."

On an island shunned by tourists as much for its aridity as for its token forms of sanitation, few influences calculated to alter this outlook had ever drifted as far as Kalymnos.

The men thought more about sponges than they thought about women, Kalymnos being the centre of the Mediterranean sponge-diving industry. Dimitri, in fact, had married Nomiki without giving any special attention to the matter: it was an arrangement their parents had made when they were still at school.

The girl was industrious, an excellent seamstress, and of a pleasant good-humoured disposition. She had a nice singing voice and could perform the Kalymnian dances with liveliness and grace. And she had brought to the marriage a gratifying proika consisting of a small cottage on the hill above the harbour (lime-washed a pale blue and with yellow shutters and doors and a trellis of grapevines), all the necessary household needs and furniture (including a fine kitchen dresser), two Swiss oleographs which her grandmother had bought in a moment of rare and irresponsible opulence, a framed set of violently coloured litho-graphs depicting the adventures of Genovefa, a white goat, and eleven brown hens.

Dimitri had not realized until seven months after their marriage that his wife was beautiful, but this realization he had never thought of conveying to her, although it had disturbed him a little at the time, as if he had suddenly discovered that the big kitchen dresser of which he was so proud was afflicted with the boring-worm.

The strong-man from Piraeus did not apply himself to the correction of this situation with any missionary zeal. His attitude to women, admittedly, was profoundly different from that of the Kalymnian men. He had drunk raki with a belly-dancer in Beirut; had two girl-friends of his own in Turkolimani, who accommodated him in the friendliest possible fashion when they were not preoccupied with the companionship of visiting yachts-men, and numbered among his acquaintances a juggler who had been divorced by his wife.

The strong-man had a distinct regard for himself as a man of the world, but he was in no sense a missionary, a crusader, a reformer. He was, in fact, really zealous about nothing but the expansion of his chest, the size of his biceps, and his ability to

loosen drachmas from the pockets of his audiences by such feats as bending steel bars across his forearm, straightening horseshoes with his bare hands, biting nails in two, and escaping from impossible situations when, seated in a chair, he was roped and chained by experts.

He was a swarthy handsome man, although rather short in stature, as if people had for many years been trying to hammer him into the ground as part of his repertoire, and he had a stiff, muscle-bound gait.

Dimitri saw him come ashore in the black caïque that brought the passengers off the *Karaiskakis*, and immediately recognized the squat figure and that unmistakable muscle-bound walk as belonging to one of the cooks who had been attached to the Greek battalion with which he had served with some considerable distinction at Rimini.

It was this fact that prompted him to hail the man with a joyful cry of recognition and welcome. In all the thirty-six years of his life, Dimitri's one day of pure glory had been that day when they had attacked the German posts at Rimini, surpassing even that later occasion when the King himself had pinned the medal to his tunic.

Dimitri's welcome to the strong-man was accordingly dictated by a sudden blazing desire to finger again the texture of this finest of his hours in the companionship of somebody who had been there too.

It was not derived from any special feeling of affection at seeing an old army comrade again: Dimitri, indeed, had a vaguely uneasy recollection of having disliked this particular cook even beyond the normal call of dislike for army cooks in general. None the less, Rimini was Rimini . . .

" Costas! " He hurried across the quay, his hand outstretched, greeting his old comrade exuberantly. " Costas Kudaris! "

" Hercules," the strong-man corrected him equably. " Fancy you not remembering! A long time, eh, Dimitri? " He smiled and lowered a meaningful glance at the long canvas bag at his feet, the bag containing the carefully softened horseshoes, the untempered steel bars that would bend with reasonable ease, the long nails doctored to an almost digestible condition of pliancy. And, sure enough, in large painted letters on the bag was the name, *Hercules Kudaris*.

" You must come to my house and eat with us," said Dimitri impulsively, because he was not a particularly quick-witted man and it had unsettled him, making a mistake about the name. And by then it was too late anyway to withdraw the invitation because the man had accepted it very quickly.

As Dimitri led the way across the plateia he was rather silent and preoccupied. He had begun to remember some singularly distasteful incidents connected with the cook at Rimini. Moreover, he had suddenly realized that this was Nomiki's day for fasolia, and there was nobody in all Greece with Nomiki's magic touch so far as fasolia was concerned. Would there be enough to go round three of them?

His sidelong glance appraised the huge swinging shoulders of the strong-man. It was obvious that here was a creature of majestic appetites, who could go through a whole potful of fasolia and then wonder when the barbounia was coming on!

Climbing up the hill, Dimitri consoled himself with the thought that it would at least be a good opportunity for Nomiki to hear about Rimini again. He was rather put out, however, to discover that the strong-man remembered nothing of the attack on the German redoubts—possibly he had been too busy watering the stew or black-marketing the battalion rations to Italians behind the lines—and when he reminded him of his own modest share in the battle and his decoration for gallantry, the strong-man raised his eyebrows and laughed in an amused, knowing way as if he suspected that Dimitri had invented the story just to impress him.

By the time they reached the blue house on the hill, Dimitri had recaptured almost all the nuances of dislike he had felt for Corporal Kudaris in the days of their Italian campaigning. Moreover, he was now quite certain that his name *was* Costas, because, thinking of him as Corporal Kudaris, he had suddenly remembered the men in his platoon always saying, " That b——d Costas! " whenever the food was more foul than usual.

" This is Costas Kudaris," he said determinedly, presenting Nomiki to him. With the infallible instinct of her sex, Nomiki was wearing her best white blouse.

" Hercules," the strong-man corrected, and bowed, lowering his cropped bullet-head over Nomiki's hand and kissing it.

He had no neck, Dimitri realized, only the cropped head poised on huge shoulders that had to be twisted sideways to enter the narrow yellow doorway. Dimitri was a head and a half taller and had to take off his black peaked sailor's cap and bend his head to pass beneath the lintel, but it wasn't the same as having to twist your shoulders sideways to get inside.

The fasolia smelt wonderful.

Throughout the meal the visitor talked a great deal about his travels and his prodigious feats of strength, addressing all his conversation to Nomiki, and there was not much opportunity to talk about Rimini, even had Dimitri wanted to, which he no

longer did because of the acute depression that had afflicted him watching the strong-man spooning up the fasolia.

Whenever there was a pause in the monologue the man's gaze, Dimitri observed, dwelt on one of the coloured lithographs concerned with the romantic adventures of Genovefa, the one showing the heroine being carried away on the charger of the marauding knight with her bodice ripped open and her bosom exposed. The strong-man ate three bowls of fasolia, so that there was no second helping for Dimitri.

The strong-man, it appeared, intended staying only three days in Kalymnos. " A wonder you don't go off your head in this dump," he said to Nomiki. " Why don't you make him take you to Piraeus? A good-looking woman like you . . ." He allowed the destiny of a good-looking woman like Nomiki to remain unexpressed, his eyes wandering to the picture of Genovefa thrown over the back of the horse.

" It's all right here," Dimitri said firmly. The marauding knight in the picture on the wall had no neck either. " It's a good life."

The strong-man shrugged. " These sponge-boats? " He smiled at Nomiki. " You come some time to Piraeus, you look me up," he said expansively. " I got plenty friends there: you just ask anyone for Hercules."

When he had gone, to settle about his hotel and to arrange his permits with the police, Nomiki said, " What a nice man Mr. Kudaris is! " and Dimitri nodded absently.

" He's so interesting."

Dimitri nodded.

" And very polite."

Dimitri nodded.

" He's very handsome, too."

Dimitri nodded.

" And he did enjoy the fasolia, didn't he? " Nomiki smiled happily.

" He did, yes," Dimitri said shortly, and went down the hill to his boat.

The strong-man's first demonstration was given that afternoon in the plateia that edged the crowded harbour. He was extremely voluble in explaining each of his feats, so that the performance was prolonged to the point where his final escape from the ropes and chains developed into a race against the accumulating dusk.

Towards the end of the demonstration Dimitri observed his wife among the crowd in the front row. He pushed through to her. " I was on my way home to eat supper," he said pointedly.

" Have you ever seen a man as *strong* as Mr. Kudaris? " Nomiki said breathlessly, as if she had not heard him.

" I was talking of supper," Dimitri said patiently.

" Oh, we can have the marides cold."

" From yesterday? " Dimitri said distantly. He was, in fact, rather partial to cold marides the day after they had been cooked.

Nomiki smiled up at him. " We could have had the fasolia, but it was all eaten. Mr. Kudaris liked it so much."

" Come," her husband said quietly. " We will have the marides."

He was still picking morosely at the platter of cold fish when the strong-man came to the door. He was carrying a flask of retsina, a basket of bread and cheese and oranges and dried octopus, and a bottle of sweet mavrodaphni which was obviously for Nomiki.

" We've eaten," said Dimitri.

But neither the strong-man nor Nomiki appeared to have heard him. His wife began to spread the table with the flower-patterned cloth with the green silk fringes, the one reserved for feast days and for Sundays when special visitors called, and after the octopus had been smoked and dipped in lemon juice she hurried off to a neighbouring house to borrow a vase of flowers for the centre of the table.

While she was away, the strong-man stared at the picture of Genovefa, humming *Psaropoula* to himself, as if he was not interested in talking to Dimitri but was only killing time until his wife returned. Dimitri found himself ruminating on the absurdity of a man spending his life straightening horseshoes, or biting nails in two. What earthly use was a *straight* horseshoe? Or half a nail?

" You ought to take a job with the sponge-boats here, Costas," he said. " Down there off Alexandria they could use a strong chap like you. That chest of yours, maybe you could dive seventy metres." Dimitri, who could dive seventy-five, put the suggestion in a faintly challenging way, but the strong-man only shrugged and smiled and continued to stare at Genovefa.

" Alexandria! " he said with startling disparagement when Nomiki returned. " That's a second-rate circuit. Now Cairo, that's different." He looked meaningly at Nomiki. " *There's* a town you should see, Cairo. Along Malika Farida, all those smart women . . ."

Early on the following afternoon Dimitri climbed the hill to the house to pick up a new coil of rope he had bought for the boat, and to his astonishment there drifted from the kitchen the

quite unmistakable aroma of beans stewing slowly in olive oil. Fasolia was for Tuesdays, and this was Wednesday.

" Fasolia? " he said to Nomiki. " We had it yesterday."

" Mr. Kudaris is coming to eat with us. It's what he asked for."

" Ah." Dimitri nodded. " I meant to tell you, I'll be eating at Tony's estiatorion with Vassilis and Constantine. There's sikoti and they've got a lobster."

" Oh, that will be nice," said Nomiki. " You like sikoti." She did not seem at all concerned.

" Maybe I'll put it off." Dimitri frowned. It would be a lot of trouble, really, trying to arrange for the others to go to Tony's, and perhaps there would only be fasolia anyway, and it wouldn't be as good as Nomiki's. " You better make a good lot," he said darkly. " That Costas, he eats like a horse."

" Why do you always call him Costas when his name is Hercules? " Nomiki shook her head reprovingly. " It's not good manners always to get names wrong, the way you do."

" I keep forgetting."

Dimitri had a cheering thought when they were eating, and he said, " So it's back to Piraeus again tomorrow, eh, Costas? "

But the strong-man shook his head and glanced rather significantly at Nomiki and said, " No, no. I'm staying on another week or ten days. It's nicer here than I thought." He ladled out another helping of beans. " In Piraeus," he said, " where would I get fasolia like this? "

In the days that followed, Dimitri arranged it so that he could spend as much time as possible around the shipyard at Lafassi, where all the caïques were pulled up on the slipways.

There was plenty of work for him to do, splicing the new sheets and halyards on his own boat, the *Aghios Stephanos*, and most of the other captains had jobs for him because he had a big reputation for handling ropes, and now that the winter overhaul of the boats was nearly completed there were all the finicky bits to be done: ends to be whipped and the lanyards and gear for the diving-ladders to be ornamented with wonderful fancy knots and Turk's-heads.

But however industrious he was, he could not help thinking about the corporal cook from Rimini who called himself Hercules. On the Friday he had come again to eat with them, and this time Nomiki had cooked the fasolia in the huge shiny cassarola which, in the normal course of things, would be used only once a year, when they had the lamb for Easter.

And on Saturday there had been nothing to eat at all, because the strong-man had taken his act to Chorio, the old village two

miles up the valley, and Nomiki had gone to watch although she had seen all his performances and there was never anything new to them.

On this occasion Dimitri had gone back to the plateia and spent the evening drinking retsina with the men from his boat: it was quite late when he returned, and Nomiki was in bed and asleep. He had been too tired to awaken her. For a long time he sat on the chair by the side of the bed, just looking at her.

It was not that he cared about her, he told himself, but he did resent coming back to an empty house and not finding his supper waiting. Although it would have been fasolia again, and he was becoming rather tired of fasolia. He was beginning to get a good deal of wind in the stomach . . .

" I'm not sleeping well," he said to Constantine, who was crouched beneath the curved hull of the *Aghios Stephanos* caulking the seams with oakum. " I get a lot of trouble with wind."

" I noticed," Constantine said, a frown of concentration on his leathery face as he tapped the oakum into the seams with the long wedge-hammer. " I hear you burping a lot. And you go red in the face." He peered up from beneath the curve of the bilge. " It's beans," he said sagely. " All that fasolia. Fasolia's all right in moderation, but—"

" Nomiki makes the best fasolia you ever tasted! " Dimitri said with defiant loyalty. " You're not going to say—"

" It don't matter who makes it," Constantine retorted stubbornly. " When it's beans it's always the same. There's a power of wind in beans, you ask anyone."

It was on the Tuesday that Dimitri went up to his house early in the afternoon on the pretext of needing his palm-and-needle because the spare mainsail wanted patching. By the time he had reached the house he had practically convinced himself that it was nothing to do with the fact that the strong-man was back in town after a two-day tour around the other villages of the island, Brosta and Myrties.

Nomiki was sitting on the step in the sunshine, darning a hole in the sleeve of Dimitri's blue-and-white jersey.

Dimitri spent a considerable time in the kitchen pretending to look for the palm-and-needle, although he was perfectly well aware that it was in the box at the bottom of the kitchen dresser with his gut lines and fish-hooks and sinkers. When he came out he said, quite casually, " It is Tuesday, isn't it? "

" Tuesday, yes." Nomiki looked up at him inquiringly.

" I just wondered," Dimitri said blandly. " I couldn't smell any fasolia, that's all."

"But we've had so much of it, Dimitri." She smiled. "It's very upsetting if you have too much."

"Tuesdays we always have fasolia," he reminded her quietly, but with a measure of dignity, as the papas might remind her about attending Communion. "I look forward to it on Tuesdays."

She stared at him for a moment, a hurt, uneasy expression flickering in her large dark eyes. "You've spoilt it now," she said, smiling faintly, as if she might conceal her disappointment. "It was to be a surprise. Mr. Kudaris brought three kilos of barbounia back from Myrties. Lovely barbounia, caught off Telendos . . ."

"Ah, he likes barbounia too?" Dimitri said detachedly.

"It's his favourite dish, Dimitri. And do you know what he said when he brought it up? He said—" she hesitated and laughed a little selfconsciously—"he said, 'Beans for strength, fish for sagacity, and a flower for a lovely lady.'"

She lowered her eyes, overcome by a sudden shyness, and she was flushing as she turned her head away. "You hadn't even noticed it," she said softly. Dimitri could see the rose, crimson in her coppery hair.

The strong-man was only halfway through his act when Dimitri reached the plateia. He eased himself to the front of the crowd and waited, curbing his impatience, while the man continued with his interminable boring patter. The sun had already slid below the cliffs above Saint Vassilios by the time he came to his grand finale.

He had borrowed a wicker chair from Katerini's kafeneia, and now he sat on it with his short legs wide apart and his fists on his thighs, and in a rather contemptuous way he was calling for a volunteer who might rope and chain him to the chair.

He seemed momentarily surprised when he observed Dimitri advancing towards him, but then he grinned and jumped from the chair and seized the opportunity of addressing another long rigmarole to the crowd.

To the Greeks, Rimini is one of the brave names, and the strong-man from Piraeus was by no means unaware of that magical power to loosen purse-strings that lies in an appeal to the things that are embedded in the militant heart of every true patriot. He talked of Rimini, of how proud he was that it was his old comrade-in-arms from that brave day who was to test his prowess. As he spoke it was in some curious way made to appear that it was the strong-man who had been decorated for gallantry while Dimitri had been somewhere behind the lines cooking macaroni.

Dimitri, thoughtfully fingering the end of half-inch rope, testing its pliancy, appeared not to be listening.

Twilight was moving stealthily across the plateia when the strong-man returned to the chair and, with a knowing wink, motioned Dimitri to begin.

Dimitri went to the task slowly and with great care, beginning with a clove-hitch to the left wrist taken tightly to a double hitch on the back of the chair, a taut clove-hitch to the right wrist, and then down to the thigh.

The crowd was hushed and watchful, and Dimitri, without looking up from his work, was conscious of the sailors and divers turning their heads and nudging each other and whispering together. Bowlines and sheepshanks, intricate hitches and reef-knots . . . the special straining knot that old Lazarus the colazaris had taught him for making fast the big stone the skin-divers carried down to the sea-bed . . . and then a mesh of cunning interlockings ending in a final double clove-hitch that would have baffled Houdini.

Dimitri wrapped the chain around the bound, rigid figure, but he did it carelessly as if, after the rope, it was the merest redundancy . . .

After he had done, Dimitri pushed through the crowd and had a leisurely coffee at Katerini's, and by the time he came back the dusk had settled over the plateia and the street lights had come on and the strong-man was still there, rigidly seated in the centre of the murmuring crowd. His complexion was much darker and his eyes were blazing and the veins on his throat and forehead were bulging out like cords. Like knotted cords.

Dimitri walked over casually and examined the ropes, but everything seemed to be holding. He glanced for a moment into the baleful eyes of the strong-man and then he looked away.

"That barbounia," he said, "it's not as good once it gets cold."

The starry night had settled over Kalymnos when Dimitri left the plateia and began to climb, whistling softly to himself, towards the little blue house on the hill. As he climbed he could almost smell in his nostrils the warm grilling smell of barbounia . . .

At the top of the steps he looked down. The crowd had thinned out a good deal and people were still drifting away to their homes and their suppers. Beneath the street lamps there were only a few men and a clot of delighted children around the writhing figure of the strong-man: and old Katerini, fat and infuriated, was slapping him over the face and shoulders with her dish-cloth because he had broken the leg of her cane chair rolling around on the ground trying to escape.

And in the stillness of the enclosing night a sound that was

more than music drifted to the ears of Dimitri—the sort of bellowing and screaming you might hear when a hog-tied animal was being taken to the slaughter-house. Dimitri went happily up the hill . . .

They ate the barbounia on the steps outside the house and Dimitri sighed with a deep content as he rubbed his bread around the bottom of the platter where, in the lamplight, the oil and lemon lay like a pool of molten gold.

" I still think we ought to have waited for him," Nomiki said guiltily. " It would have been polite."

" Listen," Dimitri spoke quietly, but with a reverent ecstasy as if he were commanding his wife to hearken to a choir of angels. From the bowl of darkness below, a sound of howling came to them, thin and anguished.

For a while they sat in silence, and then Nomiki began to laugh softly. " Dimitri, it wasn't really fair, you know," she said. " Those knots of yours. You're so wonderful with ropes."

Dimitri nodded.

" And it was your fault, too," she said earnestly. " You brought him in the first place. And he only kept coming because of the fasolia. That's true, Dimitri."

" No man comes that often for beans," Dimitri said quietly. " Not just for beans." He shook his head. " He kept coming because . . . because . . . " He hesitated and took a deep breath, the sort of breath he would take when the colazaris told him the next dive was on the deep shelves, seventy-five metres, maybe more. " He kept coming because . . . because . . . "

Dimitri moistened his lips. " He kept coming, Nomiki," he said bravely, " because you are very beautiful."

And he reached across the heaped platter of picked barbounia bones and took her hand in his.

★ ★ ★

UNACCUSTOMED

The Irish Customs seem more original in their ways. My husband and I had crossed the Irish Sea with a pair of live ornamental duck to give to my father-in-law . . . when, at Kingstown, as it then was, the officer looked with misgiving at the crate. " What's in there? " he asked. He was told. " D'you realize thim ducks is highly dutiable? " he said sternly. " But these ducks could have flown it, if they'd wanted to," said my husband. " My God, sorr, so they could! " said the delighted officer as he immediately chalked the crate.

SHEILA WINGFIELD, *Real People*

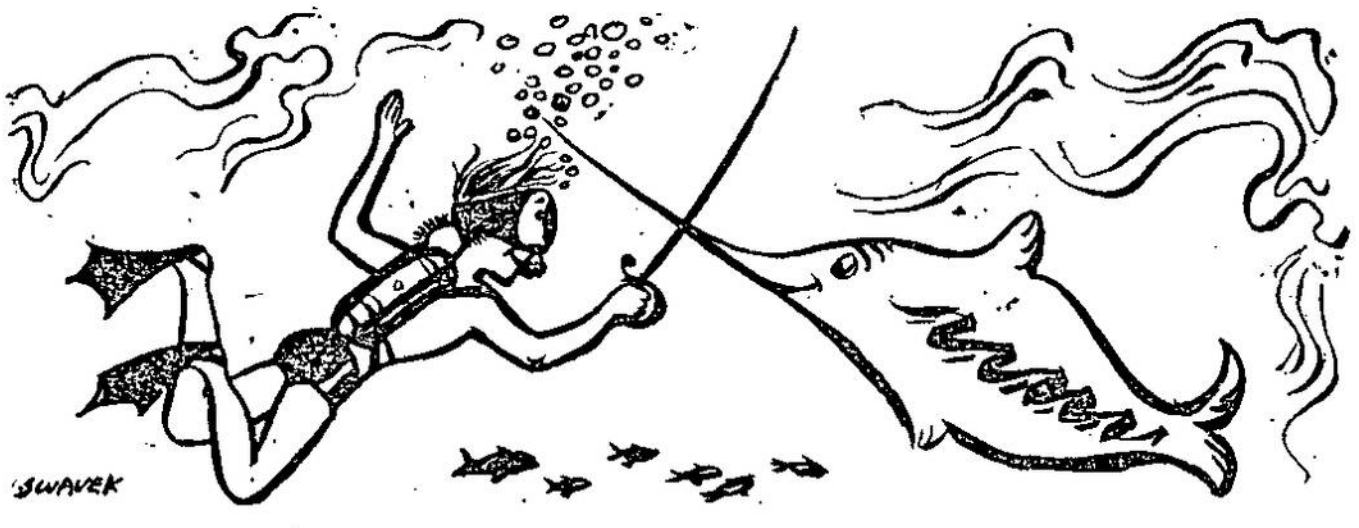
UNDERSEA FEVER

UP tails all ! Down and under !
It's time to pursue a new natural wonder ;
They're putting on flippers from Key West to Darien,
And every young blood is an oxygenarian.
Hark, hark, the shark !
What ho, the blowfish !
(This is how fisherman now in the know fish.)
Egad, a shad !
Shalom, a jewfish !
Off with the old and on with the new fish.

Off on a fish-walk ! It's not hard to vary 'em ;
Every three minutes a brand-new aquarium.
How diverse is the deep ! From mammal to mussel !
You might see a conch or, with luck, see
Jane Russell !
My God, a scrod !
Hip, hip a rayfish !
Some are exotic, some plain everyday fish.
Look sharp, a carp !
Hand me that starfish ;
I can hardly believe that some of them *are* fish.

Everest's climbed, there's no fun in spelunking,
So slip on your snorkel, everyone's dunking ;
There are no tangled fishlines, no vicious hooks about,
And it's one of the easiest things to write books about

WILLIAM COLE



SECRET OF TRINITY'S ISLAND

What unseen horror lurked in that solitary jungle cove?

BY HUGH B. CAVE

A TAPE ninety yards long would have spanned the gap between the cove's jutting jaws of coral. One only a little longer would have reached from the seaward smother of foam to the deepest penetration of placid blue anchorage. Nowhere along the curving shore was there sign of a ship or other civilized intrusion.

But the ship was there. To discover her, one had only to plunge through the lush maze which covered the deep-water inlet in which she lay.

Invisible from sea and sky, she hid in cathedral solitude, her whitened deck atilt.

Jim Park had been here before. But Brother Amiel, the little Filipino missionary, gazed a moment in awed silence and spoke at last in a whisper: "By heaven, it is Trinity's *Gale*! It *is*!" And his puckered face blossomed with relief, for he was an old hand who well knew what most men never learn: that hearsay in the islands is seldom more than half a truth.

They made a strange pair, these two who had come by ketch, down through the mist of islands to remote Tenangal. Jim Park, in his early twenties, had spent the war years on a motor torpedo-boat, and in that brief time had seen nearly as much of the Pacific as had the little Filipino in a lifetime of mission work.

They had met in Cebu. In seeking out the solemn little man of God, Jim Park knew only that Brother Amiel had written a book. And, having located his man in a mountain barrio after days of search, he had broached the subject of his visit warily.

"I read your book," he said, sitting there in the gloom of Brother Amiel's nipa-thatched house, with an eye on the naked children playing noisily about the steps, "and have been hoping for a chance to talk to you ever since. So when the Company sent me down here to Cebu City on business, I looked you up." And he eyed the little missionary with the reserve that young

stalwarts commonly feel towards puny middle-aged men whose way of life is a mystery to them. " You did write the book? "

" I have written several books," said Brother Amiel.

" I mean the one about Martin Trinity and the *Bella Gale*."

" Yes."

" Well," said Jim Park bluntly, " in it you wrote that when Trinity's ship disappeared, she had pearls aboard. About fifty thousand dollars' worth, you said. Is that a fact? "

Brother Amiel's smile was wry. A treasure-hunter, he thought. A young hopeful who had stumbled upon another man's account of buried loot and was now white-hot to dig it up.

He himself had merely written a book. " Some say the pearls were valued at very much more than that," he said.

" And no one knows what happened to Trinity's schooner? "

" No one knows."

Jim Park looped his arms on his chest and smiled—not a pleasant smile by Brother Amiel's gentle standards. He was a massive young man with black curly hair, a clean-cut, squarish face, and sharp blue-black eyes that betrayed suspicion of other men's motives. Brother Amiel, who had slept comfortably with savages, felt no warmth towards him.

" I saw the *Bella Gale* six months ago," Jim Park said. " That would be four or five months after she vanished." And with his hands gripping his knees, he watched the other's indifference disappear.

They talked the whole night long after that, and before morning Brother Amiel was convinced that his visitor was telling the truth. The boy had been based at Davao at the end of the war, and his boat, with others, had been sent to certain remote islands to search for stranded airmen. There was a native rumour that a plane had fallen on Tenangal, and while exploring the shore of that wild and ugly island, Jim Park and his mates had come upon Trinity's ship.

" We didn't go aboard her," he said. " None of us had even heard of Martin Trinity. But after I got out of uniform, while I was working in Manila, I read your book. So now I'm here—with time on my hands."

" A friend of mine," said Brother Amiel, " has a ketch which perhaps we can borrow. I should like very much to know what finally became of Martin Trinity."

" Me," said Jim Park, rubbing his hands, " I'd like to see those pearls! "

The width of the inlet lay between them and their objective, and Brother Amiel stood frowning at the catacombs of swamp and

jungle barring their way around it. But Jim Park had already tugged off his canvas shoes and was wading in.

He swam well. He was a young man, who obviously did everything well. Stroking cleanly to the bow of the schooner, he paused to peer down into the water, and called back matter-of-factly, "It's deep here, deeper than you'd think." And he clambered onto the vessel's sloping deck.

Brother Amiel removed his shirt and loosened the sheath-knife at his waistband before following. A cautious man, he moved slowly—and wondered, now that the fate of the *Gale* herself was solved, what had become of her captain.

Pearls, after all, were but wealth, and wealth or the lack of it had never been a matter of much concern to him. But the *Gale*'s notorious skipper, Martin Trinity, and his way of life were a legend debated from the Sulus to Moresby, and with ways of life the little missionary was always concerned. Hence he, too, paused under the ship's bow and peered down to discover if perhaps a twinkle of whitened bones might be seen in the depths.

He saw no bones. Above him the ship's planking was pitted and gouged, as if chewed by some marine creature with the teeth of a rat, and in the gloom under him, small indolent shadows with slender arms lazily explored the ship's bottom; and that was all. Without dawdling, he boosted himself up.

"One thing is certain," he observed, seating himself on the transom to get his breath. "She was not blown here by storm. A storm may have sent her here for refuge, but she was beached with care, by men who must have planned to sail her out again. Now why was she left to rot? Why was that?"

Jim Park had no patience for such riddles. "The devil with it," he growled. "Let's get after the pearls!"

The *Bella Gale* had been a ship of character despite her evil reputation, and she was still sound after her months in this ripe temple of sleep. Her canvas and bedding were neatly stowed. Her small gear remained in condition fit for use. There were still provisions in her galley.

But she was coy with her secrets. The tiny safe in her cabin stood open and empty. Her papers, if she had had any, were gone.

Patiently, the two men searched her. They explored the small hold beyond the doorless panel in her forward bulkhead, and probed the shadows of her foc'sle. They crept from one dark cranny to the next. The ship told them nothing.

In the swelter of high noon they rested on deck awhile, and then began again. This time, in the hold, Brother Amiel discovered an answer to one small portion at least of the mystery.

Sliding about on hands and knees in stagnant water, he

exclaimed, " Jim, look here. Feel, rather. A hole I could crawl through! "

Jim Park came to his side. " She could have been patched," he said. " This can't be why she's rotting here."

" Patched? If a man owned a diving-suit, maybe."

" Or if he didn't. We repaired worse holes during the war without any diving-suits." Irritably he turned away. " The devil with it! We came here for pearls, not to salvage a wreck."

But after hours more of crawling about Martin Trinity's vessel, even Jim was ready to admit that the pearls they sought were not aboard her. As day ended, the two men swam ashore in silence and trudged down the strip of beach to the tent they had erected at the jungle's edge. Each was despondent, though not for the same reason.

The breeze had died down. Night was gathering isle and ocean into one vast sweating shadow, and the jungle, close and dark, mocked them with its stillness.

Brother Amiel entered the tent, came out immediately. " We have had a caller," he remarked.

It was true. The coral carpet revealed no footprints, but thieving hands had left in utter disorder the provisions and equipment that Brother Amiel had stowed away that morning. Clothing and tinned food were scattered about the ground. Duffel bags had been emptied. Some clothing and foodstuffs were missing.

" You told me this island was uninhabited! " Jim Park said accusingly.

" No. I said it was wild and little known. There are Bajaos—sea gipsies—on many of these outlying isles, and on some there are nomad tribes of Moros." He had lit a lantern, and now he stopped to finger a mound of clothing. " I've lost a raincoat. And you, I think, have lost your shoes. Yet I believe our caller was no white man. This is the work of a curious, childish mind."

" Well, what do we do now? Sit up and wait for another visit? "

" We would be safer, perhaps, on the ketch."

Jim Park pawed through the dumped-out contents of his bag and straightened up with a pistol in his hand. " You can sleep on the ketch if you want to. I stay here."

" But it may not be wise."

" I can take care of myself."

" Yes," said Brother Amiel, not without a hint of smile. " I believe you have said so before."

" And I'll say so again! "

" Then we'll stay," Brother Amiel murmured. " Of course."

They were not eager to sleep—not with prowlers in the vicinity. Between spells of listening to sea-murmur and the assorted small sounds of the jungle, they lay under mists of insect-netting and talked.

They talked of the *Bella Gale* and her skipper; and as usual they disagreed, though without rancour, for the debate was by now a mere diversion.

"He was a man of ability, certainly. On that point I agree," said the little missionary. "But his principles—ah no. There I must dissent."

"He knew what he wanted, which is more than most men do," Jim Park insisted. "You said so yourself in your book."

"But mostly, of course, Martin Trinity wanted what was not his. These pearls we seek, for example. They were stolen. Otherwise he would not have fled from Tutu when the native pearlers went to the authorities about him."

"Well, he got away with it. Nothing ever licked him."

"Nothing?" echoed Brother Amiel softly. "Then why are we here?"

"I mean nothing human. He could take care of himself, Trinity could. I admire that in a man."

Long after midnight, weary of talk, the little missionary fell asleep . . .

When he woke at dawn, he was alone.

He was not alarmed. Thinking his companion might have been eager to explore the schooner again, he went up the beach to the inlet in search of him.

But Jim Park was not there, and Brother Amiel's anxious calls were unanswered. He returned to the tent and searched for footprints along the crumbling crust of coral.

At last, where the ground softened at the jungle's edge, he found a mark. Some time after midnight Jim Park had gone into the jungle.

Brother Amiel sat for a time, dismayed, pondering his position. He was not a vigorous man. The prospect of thrusting himself into that tangled green maze filled him with apprehension. Nevertheless, he had to try. And so, with tins of food in his pockets, insect lotion smeared heavily on hands and face, and high boots on his feet to protect him from snakes, he, too, pushed into the jungle.

Presently he found a trail of sorts. He went along it with caution, his head cocked like a listening bird's. In that light human eyes could see little, but Brother Amiel had good ears.

Nevertheless, he was taken quite by surprise. He failed to hear the brown men who suddenly glided like wraiths from the

jungle's gloom to surround him. Confused and frightened, he stood immobile.

Never before had he encountered savages as small, as gnarled, as seemingly inhospitable as these. Their weapons ran the gamut from gleaming creese to polished blowgun; their nakedness indicated a total lack of contact with the outside world.

Brother Amiel raised a hand in what he hoped was a friendly greeting. Then he waited, shaking with apprehension.

After a time they seized him and prodded him along the path.

The path led ultimately to a village of huts which stretched for some distance along the bank of a slow-moving stream. Brother Amiel was marched through the settlement, peered at by curious women, and pawed at by swarming children. He did not protest.

At the end of his grotesque march he found himself in a dwelling near the river, face to face with Jim Park.

" They jumped on me," Jim Park snarled, " before I'd got ten feet into the jungle. I heard something and went out to investigate. They took me by surprise."

Brother Amiel looked at him and smiled. " This time you were not quite self-sufficient, eh? Well, my son, what now? Are we prisoners? "

For answer, Jim Park turned grimly and pointed. The little Filipino saw then that they were not alone.

The figure that shared their rude prison would not object to their presence, however. He was beyond that. Flesh had long since fallen away from bone, and all that remained was a lifeless sitting skeleton clothed in shoes and shirt and trousers. The garb was undeniably that of a white man, but the colour of the corpse within had long since become a matter of conjecture.

Brother Amiel turned away with a slight shudder. " Is this what we are to become, do you suppose? "

" I don't know." Jim Park stepped angrily towards the doorway. " What are they, anyway? "

" They are pagan Moros, I should imagine. Sangils from Mindanao, perhaps, or Yakans from the mountains. Only a little of their talk can I understand."

" Well, tell 'em we want to get out of here."

" I can try."

Brother Amiel stepped from the swelter of the hut into the blazing sunshine and started towards a gathering of natives some twenty yards distant. He was seized—more roughly than before—after advancing a dozen paces. Nevertheless, he spoke, and they listened.

But if they understood his faltering attempts to converse, they

were not in a mood to let him know it. He was thrust back into the hut and sent sprawling at Jim Park's feet. Rising and brushing himself, he said with a small sigh, " Apparently we are to remain here until they decide what is to be done with us." And added wryly, " That may take some time."

" If only I had my gun back! " Jim snarled.

" Where, by the way, is your gun? "

" I dropped it when they jumped on me."

Brother Amiel was silent. A brief reconnaissance at the doorway convinced him that there was no immediate cause for apprehension, and he sought a place to sit and rest.

But while he rested, Brother Amiel found his gaze turning more and more often to the thing propped against the wall, and at last he went towards it. Jim Park watched him curiously.

" By any chance," Jim said, " would that be the man we're looking for? "

" Martin Trinity? No. Trinity was tall, as tall as you—a large and powerful man. This poor fellow was nearer my size."

" But if it isn't Trinity, then who—"

" That is what I have been wondering." Stepping between the dead man's outstretched legs, Brother Amiel bent forward to feel into the pockets of the mildewed clothes.

Surprisingly, the pockets were not empty. From one of them he took matches and a small fistful of Dutch and Philippine coins, from another a disintegrating packet of cigarettes, from yet another a small yellowed notebook. When the search was completed, he returned all but the notebook. That he opened and, glancing at its contents, he said presently, " Jim—look here."

It was a strange document. Unlike most of the cut-throats who at one time or another had followed the leadership of Martin Trinity, the owner of this small book had been a man of education. He was, at least, a handy fellow with words.

He wrote of having met the captain of the *Bella Gale* in Manado, which is in Celebes, and signed on with him for a pearling voyage to the Sulus. He told at some length of their having had the excellent fortune to encounter trusting natives at work on a new-found pearl bed in the vicinity of Singaan Island. Discreetly he omitted certain details of the ensuing transaction, but he was lyrical in describing how they proceeded to Tutu Bay a week later, with wealth enough to make Trinity and his four-man crew independent for years to come. He told of their subsequent departure from Tutu.

" There is a typhoon brewing to the south of here, and it will likely be our dismal luck to run into it, pearls and all," he wrote, " but run we must, for complaints have been made to the

authorities here. Trinity's at fault this time. A man of more tact would have avoided such a situation."

The entries that followed were marked by a brevity quite explained by their content.

"This afternoon we lost Jarneson. He fell overboard, says Trinity. Perhaps he did, too—the weather is foul enough, and we have been shipping seas big enough to wash an elephant off his feet. But he and Trinity argued violently this morning over the latter's determination to make for Halmahera in such weather, and it's likely he was helped overboard by a kick on the rump. Well, good riddance and one less to share with, say I. He was a loud-mouthed devil, anyway.

". . . We've a good ship, thank heaven, or the fish would be dining on us by now. Never have I seen such a storm before! But, says Trinity, we point for Halmahera, come hell or high water. Cookie, stupid fool, made the mistake of arguing with him, and for his temerity was bashed with a pump bar. He lies abed in convulsions and will die, I have no doubt, for we've no time to attend to him.

". . . We still float, and that incredible man Trinity still defies the storm. Last night the cook died and was tossed overboard, so only three of us are left to work the ship—Fenton with a broken arm, for he was flung against the transom this morning by a wave high as Mt. Apo. But we'll survive. No one doubts it. Trinity is worth a dozen ordinary men. And he laughs!"

The next entry, dated four days later, went into some detail:

"The typhoon is finished, and so, from the look of things, are we. Only Trinity and myself are left. The *Bella Gale*, God rest her gallant heart, lies beached with a hole in her big enough to run pigs through, and we are prisoners of wild men.

"We made this dismal island, whatever and wherever it is, by the skin of our teeth after being flung across its reef on the tail of the typhoon. Fenton was alive then, and the three of us managed to run her ashore before she filled, after which we slept like dead men round the clock.

"Our mistake was in not patching her up at once and clearing out of here. The place looked uninhabited, however, and so, like babes in the wood, we must exploring go. The natives, damn them, must have been watching us for hours, waiting for us, for in the wink of an eye they had us like bugs in a bottle.

"Fenton, poor fool, ran for it, though we hadn't so much as a nut-pick with us, and the brown devils were armed to the teeth with blades and blowguns. He was brought down by a blowgun dart. Trinity and I were hustled here to a native village and imprisoned.

" So here we sit, reasonably well fed, and unfettered, but not permitted to leave the grass hut in which they've tossed us. What's to become of us? Lord knows! We count the hours. We sit and talk. Trinity prowls from wall to wall like a caged tiger. I write my memoirs, and tell him, when he asks, that I'm composing a farewell message to my wife. I have no wife, but what's the difference? This remarkable man, for all his incredible qualities, has not learnt to read."

According to the dates, the next entry in the dead-man's diary had been set down three days later.

" We have been talking of escape, since it now seems obvious that if we don't force the issue somehow we shall be allowed to rot here. It can be done, Trinity insists, with a bit of play-acting to frighten the fellow who guards us at night. These people are Yakans, he says, and superstitious. He sits in the doorway and talks to them whenever they will listen, he knowing enough of their lingo to understand them and be understood.

" The cove where our ship lies, says Trinity, is tabu—which is why we were not molested until we left the *Gale* and foolishly went exploring. If we can reach the cove, then, we'll be safe, and once aboard the ship, we can repair her and clear out of here.

" Here is his plan. Tonight, soon after dark, we take the grass from our sleeping-mats and fashion a dummy to look as nearly as possible like me. We dress the thing in my shirt and pants, and put on its head the woven straw hat I wear. We cover its face with a piece of cloth.

" We sit this dummy against the wall here, in the deadest-looking posture we can manage, and then, while I hide in a corner under a sleeping-mat, Trinity goes wailing to the door to draw the guard's attention to the dismal fact that I've passed away.

" They've some odd superstitions about death, says he—one of them being that the soul of a man is usually absent while he sleeps, and may raise all manner of rumpus if it returns to find the door shut by death. When this happens, there must be shouting and shrieking to drive the poor homeless thing from the village, lest it haunt the place indefinitely. So, says Trinity, our guard will undoubtedly scamper to spread the awful news as soon as he is told I'm dead, and we'll then be free to slip out and make for the cove where, with the tabu in effect, they will not follow.

" Tonight, then, we escape. Perhaps."

Brother Amiel turned the following pages, but they were blank. He shut the book and gazed at his companion. " That seems to be all," he said, and then swung about to peer at the skeleton propped against the wall. " Yes, that seems to be quite all."

"I don't get it," muttered Jim Park. "But they didn't both get away; that's certain. Do you suppose Trinity was wrong about the tabu?"

"I think not. The twisted trees growing about the inlet are baletes. Many native tribes believe them to be the abode of spirits. Remember, too, we found canvas, bedding, small gear, even provisions aboard the ship, untouched."

Brother Amiel tucked the notebook into his pocket and went to the entrance. "I'll see what I can find out." And, squatting on his heels in the doorway, he spoke to the gnarled brown man who sat outside.

It was useless. After peering at him hostilely for a moment, the native turned his back.

Brother Amiel sighed and shook his head. He was very tired. He lay down and closed his eyes. But Jim Park, though nearly as tired, sat thinking. If Martin Trinity had been able to devise a way of escape from this place, he, Jim Park, could do so, too. He rose presently and began to pace the floor . . .

They were fed before the day ended. Without comment, quantities of coconuts and limp fresh squid, ripe fruit and wild berries were brought to them, for which Brother Amiel thanked the guard graciously while Jim Park glared his hatred. The sun sank in a yellow haze while they sat eating. Night sank upon the village. A second guard joined the first at the entrance to their nipa prison.

"We could dig under the back wall here," Jim Park suggested. "It's a sort of clay, soft enough."

Brother Amiel smiled wanly. "Have you ever tried to make your way through a jungle in the dark?"

"But we've got to get out of here! Look what happened to him!" And Jim pointed to their silent companion.

"To be sure, we must get out. But the jungle is not friendly, my son. They would catch us easily. We would almost certainly lose our way."

"There's a stream out there. It must flow into the ocean. We could follow it."

"In the dark? Through miles of swamp?"

"Well, what *are* we going to do?"

"Tomorrow," said Brother Amiel thoughtfully, "I may be able to talk to them. Remember, I have dealt with natives all my life. Not all of them are vicious."

"They murdered *him*," Jim muttered, pointing again.

"Did they? Or was he murdered by someone he trusted more?"

Jim Park's eyes widened. "You mean—"

"Like yourself," murmured Brother Amiel, frowning, "Martin Trinity was a man convinced of his ability to solve all problems without aid. Would he have been content to offer up a dummy dead man, do you think, when it was so easy to be more realistic?"

"No . . ."

"I would give a good deal to know what happened. After all, I wrote the book, you know—and it would be interesting to know how it should end." Brother Amiel put aside the remnants of his meal and lay down again. "But we shall never know, I imagine. Meanwhile, we need sleep."

But there was no sleep for Jim Park that night. He paced his prison, thinking fiercely of escape and resenting the lack of concern on the placid face of his sleeping companion. Time and again he went to the doorway, to stand and gaze out at the dark, silent village and jungle.

The silence unnerved him. The presence of the two guards squatting near the entrance aroused in him a savage bitterness, so that at times he had to fight back a dangerous impulse to hurl himself upon them. Patience was not one of Jim Park's many talents.

It was almost a relief when, towards morning, the tops of invisible jungle trees began bending before a rising wind, and the night's stillness filled with sounds of storm.

Storms in the islands on the thin fringes of the Sulu Archipelago announce themselves with no prelude. More often than not, they ride in unheralded, and paralyse with the unexpected impact of a lightning bolt. This one was typical. In half an hour it had swelled to a fine fury of wind that howled and roared over the island, and in half an hour more it was a drowning deluge, tumbling the villagers from their flimsy huts.

Jim Park stood in the doorway watching the brown men as they scampered to hold their homes together. He saw the lightning lancing down among them, and he grinned at their miseries.

A hand touched his arm gently, and the voice of Brother Amiel said, "We had best go, Jim. We must not wait."

Jim Park spun round to find the little missionary at his elbow, gazing wide-eyed at the storm's tumult. "Leave here now?" he gasped. "Are you crazy?"

"We may be too late as it is," said Brother Amiel. "If the ketch is swept away, we shall be in real trouble."

"The ketch! Lord, I'd forgotten."

"I think I would rather be crushed by a falling tree or struck by lightning," said Brother Amiel gravely, "than be marooned here till the end of time. Come!"

No one saw them depart—or, at any rate, no one saw fit to challenge them. The wind shrieked to silence the sound of their going. The jungle hissed and writhed about them as it was impaled on the flaming spears of light flung into it from the wild sky. They followed the river, with Brother Amiel in the lead, and two miles of terror between them and the sea.

But in the islands, storms relent quickly, too, and this one died as it was born. The wind was all at once only a whimper. The jungle stopped writhing. The rain became a steady, throbbing downpour in which the fugitives felt their way, stumbling and wading through bog and forest.

Long after Jim Park, the self-sufficient one, had lost his bearings and was but blindly following the other's lead—long after he surely would have blundered in circles if left alone—the drip of the drenched jungle swelled to a hiss of pounding surf, and they burst from their world of gloom upon a sodden stretch of beach.

But the pallor in the dawn sky showed them only an empty sea. The ketch was gone.

"Perhaps," said Brother Amiel wearily, "she was blown ashore somewhere and can be saved. We can look." He sat for a moment to rub his legs, and then, with effort, rose again. "We can hope . . ."

They plodded the island's twisting shore, over tangled roots and brown crags of coral, wading the mouths of rain-wild streams that poured from the jungle's fastness. They trudged a mile, or maybe two, but the boat they sought had vanished.

At last, cruelly cut by the coral barriers over which they had climbed, they sank down on the sand. But Brother Amiel would permit only a brief rest, even then.

"We must go back to Trinity's ship," he said. "There, at least, they will not molest us—if the cove is indeed tabu." He forced himself up. And again they trudged along the shore.

Arriving at Trinity's schooner, they flung themselves down on her deck and lay like dead men, too far gone to move. The rain stopped. A giddy sun blossomed to gild the sodden world. And the natives came.

But beyond the ghostly fringe of balete trees along the cove's rim the natives dared not venture, and after watching the two white men awhile in silence they vanished again. Brother Amiel heaved a sigh of relief.

"I'll look for something to put on these cuts of ours," he said, "and while I'm about it, you can be thinking how to patch the hole." He tried to smile. "We are lucky, I think, to be alive!"

Jim Park swore bitterly, for to his way of thinking the word

" lucky " was out of place. Nevertheless, he roused himself and went below to look again at the hole in the *Gale*'s planking. And when Brother Amiel had dressed the coral cuts on his legs with iodine from the ship's cabin, Jim Park stated his opinion.

" She can be made watertight with layers of canvas, I should think, and if that's the extent of what's wrong with her, we can sail her out of here. It won't be a pleasure trip, but with luck we may make Sarangani. I'll have to go over the side."

" It cannot be done from inside, Jim? " asked Brother Amiel anxiously, remembering their first visit to the ship.

" Not so that she'll hold."

" I see. Well then, you will rest awhile first, eh? You should lie here in the sun while I forage for something to eat in the galley."

" Nothing doing," Jim protested. " The natives may come back. If they want us, that fool tabu won't hold them off for ever! "

" But you need rest . . ."

To Jim Park's face came an expression which Brother Amiel had seen there many times before, but which of late had not been so much in evidence. " I'm O.K.," Jim muttered. " I can take care of myself! "

The spots of a leopard, Brother Amiel thought, are dyed deep. But he did not argue. With a shrug he turned away. And then, his gaze trapped suddenly by something on shore, he let out an exclamation.

" No," said Brother Amiel, staring. " It can't be . . . It can't! "

They had a visitor. Where the grove of balete trees crept in tangled confusion to the water's edge, an utterly strange figure had emerged from the lush jungle and stood gazing at them—a figure garbed in ragged remnants of trousers and wearing on its feet the shoes which had been stolen from Jim Park's duffel bag.

" Hey," said Jim Park, " he's *white*, isn't he? "

Brother Amiel only nodded, for the answer was obvious. The creature was white; even his hair and flowing beard were white. And despite a frame that seemed squeezed to the thinness of a rope, he was taller than Jim Park, with chest and shoulders that must once have been powerful.

The little Filipino impulsively stepped towards him. That was a mistake. Though yards of water still lay between them, the man on shore scampered back and dived into his screen of trees. Moments passed before his shaggy head was again thrust out.

This time Brother Amiel spoke, his voice not loud, " Hullo, there. You're Martin Trinity, aren't you? "

The fellow did not answer.

" You *are* Martin Trinity," said Brother Amiel, using his voice as a caress, as if addressing a timid child.

" This is your ship."

No answer.

" There's nothing to be afraid of," Brother Amiel went on. " We don't mean to harm you."

But the frightened creature came no closer.

" We'd like to talk to you, that's all. We're about to leave here. Perhaps you would like to come with us, away from this place."

The man ashore only stared, his eyes bright as a bird's and his bony hands uplifted as though to ward off a blow.

Brother Amiel, puzzled, turned to Jim Park. " He must be quite mad."

" Hell," Jim Park said, " if that's Martin Trinity, *I* want to talk to him. And not long distance, either! "

He lurched forward and left the deck in a clean dive. When he reached the end of his swim and strode from the water, the man at the jungle's edge had vanished again—this time in headlong flight.

From the depths of the jungle came the sound of his going: a crackling of brush and the bursting of rotten tree limbs—and a strange, shrill whimpering like the cry of a terrified animal.

Jim Park would have plunged into the jungle after him, but was halted by Brother Amiel's cry: " Come back! You'll be caught by the natives! "

Reluctantly he returned to the ship. " Why do the natives allow *him* to run loose? " he demanded.

" Nothing would induce them to lay hands on one who is insane."

" Insane, hey? Are you *sure* that was Trinity? "

" It was Martin Trinity," said Brother Amiel.

Jim shook his head, scowling. " I don't get it, I just don't. If he escaped from the village after he and his pal were captured, why didn't he repair the ship and clear out? A man could sail the *Gale* by himself if he had to."

It was, obviously, a personal disappointment to Jim Park, this discovery of his idol's downfall. " Confound it, he never let anything lick him before! What licked him this time? And what are we going to do about him? "

" There is nothing we can do. We cannot hunt him down like an animal. We ourselves would be captured."

" Then we leave him here? "

" Of necessity," said the little Filipino with a shrug. " But we can report his presence here to the authorities, after we ourselves have escaped. *If* we escape, perhaps I should say.

Do not forget, my son—what defeated Martin Trinity may defeat us also."

Jim Park went below, to return some moments later with tools and rope and canvas. Dumping the load on deck, he made one end of the rope fast to the transom, to its other end he tied a weight of rusted iron which he thrust overboard. It struck with a great splash and sank into twilight gloom.

Down this rope, with a roll of canvas in the waistband of his trousers and a hammer in his teeth, he manœuvred himself, guiding his descent by thrusting upward against the *Bella Gale*'s hull. His fingers found plenty of grips, for it was here precisely that Brother Amiel had earlier noticed the odd gouging of the ship's timbers, as if she had been chewed by some sort of marine worm with the teeth of a rat.

" My son," said Brother Amiel, leaning above him, " be careful, I beg you! "

For just an instant, his shoulders still above the surface, Jim Park glanced up at the worried face above, and, amused, indulged in a grin.

" Your Trinity may be a wash-out," said he, " but Jim Park can take care of himself, and don't you forget it! " And breathing deeply, he ducked under.

On his first trip into the depths he managed only to unroll the canvas against the ragged hole in the ship's side and drive a nail or two to hold it in place. But he stayed below longer the next time, and still longer the third—so long that Brother Amiel, kneeling above and peering down, marvelled at his ability to store breath so long. Brother Amiel could see enough to know that the task demanded strength and endurance of which he himself would not have been capable.

Then the little Filipino, gaze fastened on the dim figure below, saw something else in the depths, and recoiled with a gasp of dismay.

He saw a faint stirring of shadows, as of slender arms lazily exploring the ship's bottom, and he saw the shadows moving towards Jim Park's legs.

Frantically he began to shout at the top of his voice and pound the deck with his fists as a signal. " Jim, watch out! Jim! *Jim!* "

But he was too late. The exploring arms fastened gently and firmly about Jim Park's ankles.

Brother Amiel saw the boy look down, startled; saw his mouth open, as if even there, in the depths, he must cry out in horror.

Jim dropped the hammer. He let go the rope. Doubling

like a jack-knife, he thrust his hands into the vague and shadowy mass that had enveloped his legs, and tore at it with a frenzy that sent spouts of water bubbling and seething to the surface. And—miracle of miracles—he won free.

His legs flashed, driving the swirling mass of shadow backwards for an instant while he groped for and caught the rope at the ship's side.

Like a thing pursued in a nightmare, he climbed until at last his gasping mouth struggled above water and he could breathe.

And then his legs were snared again.

But Brother Amiel, leaning above, could grasp his wrists now. He gripped with hands like claws, and clung and pulled, while the multi-armed mass of shadows hung on in a grisly tug-of-war. Physical strength was not Brother Amiel's forte, perhaps, but he had a fair substitute—call it will-power. He had that, and to spare.

Slowly, a breath at a time, he bested the squirming things that sought to drag Jim Park down again. Inch by inch, he fought them until at last they let go, beaten, and Jim lay gasping on deck.

Brother Amiel worked over him gently, and presently the moaning ceased and the boy became aware of his escape. "W—what was it?" he whispered. "My God, *what was it?*"

"Not 'it,'" Brother Amiel informed him, "but 'they.' I think we know now, my son, why the *Bella Gale* lies here rotting, and why Martin Trinity was marooned here on the island. They must breed here, these rock squid, by the thousands. Never before have I seen so many in one place!"

"It was no rock squid that had hold of me!"

"Not one, my son, but a great mass of them—one monster made of many."

"My God!" said Jim Park, shuddering.

Brother Amiel was deep in thought.

"Consider those odd marks on the side of the ship," he said, "as if a creature with teeth had chewed the planks. Do you understand now what caused them? The great Martin Trinity escaped from the village by offering the last of his companions as a sacrifice. He made his way here, convinced he could repair the ship and sail her away by himself. But he, like you, was set upon when he entered the water.

"And so—picture it, my son—he stood on the shore there, a man marooned by his own cupidity, and hurled chunks of coral into the water by the ship there, in a hopeless effort to drive away the creatures that had beaten him. He did this many times, perhaps, before his mind weakened. Hundreds of misaimed chunks must have struck the ship to gash her timbers so."

Brother Amiel raised his head to gaze at the jungle into which the mad Martin Trinity had vanished. Then he roused himself. "Well, my son, when you are ready, we had best get on with the work."

"On with it!" Jim Park sputtered. "You mean I'm to go below there again? Not on your life! If Trinity couldn't figure out a way—"

"Trinity was alone, my son. There are two of us."

"I don't see what difference—"

"The difference between life and death," said Brother Amiel softly.

He went below. Returning, he laid two long timbers on the deck and, with nails and a hammer, fashioned them into a long-handled sweep.

Into the ship's planking he drove two spikes, inches apart, to serve as a rowlock. With his grotesque oar in place, he leaned on it and with steady strokes churned the water at the ship's side to a depth of ten feet.

"With the water stirred up about you," he said, "you will be safe. I have seen the natives do it many times when pearling."

"Are you—sure?"

"Trinity's mistake," said Brother Amiel, smiling, "was in leaving no one alive to aid him. Even weak men are sometimes of value, eh? Yes, my son, I am sure."

Jim Park did not protest again.

When his strength had returned, he went over the side, and this time he was not molested.

Dusk had deepened over Tenangal when the *Bella Gale*, with her mildewed sails cupping a breath of offshore breeze, slipped from the purple cove of the baletes and stood out to sea.

She was no beauty. Her timbers creaked a dismal dirge as they woke from their long coma. But she floated, and she heeded her helm. And Jim Park's patch held out the water rippling past her hull.

The two men on her weathered deck stood gazing at the land they left, silent because their departure was something of a miracle.

They in turn were being watched, they supposed, by eyes ashore—hostile eyes of brown men, and the bird-bright eyes of an almost human creature whose exploits were discussed and debated from the Sulus to Moresby. But in the dark they could not be sure, nor did they much care.

Jim Park was first to turn away.

"Well," said he, conceding a point, "we have no pearls for our

trouble, but at least we've found a new ending to the book of Martin Trinity."

Brother Amiel looked a little longer before turning to the helm. And perhaps a new beginning, he thought, to the book of Jim Park. But being a man of wisdom and infinite patience, he refrained from putting the thought into words.

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ANSWERS to ATTENTION, PARENTS! on page 14

1. *The Capulets, in "Romeo and Juliet," by William Shakespeare.*
2. *The Duchess, in "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," by Lewis Carroll.*
3. *Mr. and Mrs. Jellyby, in "Bleak House," by Charles Dickens.*
4. *Colonel Blount, in "Vile Bodies," by Evelyn Waugh.*
5. *The Bolter, in "The Pursuit of Love," by Nancy Mitford.*
6. *The Bennets, in "Pride and Prejudice," by Jane Austen.*
7. *Meriam Beetle, in "Cold Comfort Farm," by Stella Gibbons.*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Tapestry.* 5, *Walrus.* 9, *Antelope.* 10, *Bruise.* 11, *Ewe Lambs.* 12, *Gibbet.* 14, *Fine shower.* 18, *Chatelaine.* 22, *Region.* 23, *Emigrant.* 24, *Friars.* 25, *Queen Bee.* 26, *Lights.* 27, *Fortress.*

Down. 1, *Traces.* 2, *Putney.* 3, *Sultan.* 4, *Republican.* 6, *Airtight.* 7, *Rainbows.* 8, *Smelters.* 13, *Pernambuco.* 15, *Scornful.* 16, *Haggling.* 17, *Democrat.* 19, *Egbert.* 20, *Marble.* 21, *Athens.*

THOMAS TITTLEMOUSE COMPETITION

Readers came through manfully with alternative pursuits for T. Tittlemouse, though we felt some of their ideas, such as spouses in other men's houses, would have landed him in worse trouble than the original version. Popular theories as to what he caught were diseases from other men's sneezes, haddocks in other men's paddocks; one competitor gloomily suggested grubby sheep in another man's rubbish heap. First prize of a guinea goes to Lt.-Commander D. B. Morison, Yelverton, Devon, for:

He caught wapiti
In other men's property.

Half a guinea to A. Thomson, of West Coker, Somerset, for:

He caught Ladybirds
With honied words,

and to Ronald A. Fry, West Dulwich, S.E.21, for his suggestion regarding obsidian in the Greenwich meridian.

EVIL IS SILVER

No planet is all that it seems

BY KEN GENTRY

"WE'RE down, Captain! We made it down!"

The rocket ship stopped making noise and stood silently, stiffly, upon the new planet. Uncoiling themselves, the crew made routine habitation tests.

"Right, men." Captain John Reeves looked upwards as he spoke, back along the wash of their journey, through two years of black distance and tomb quietness and small incident. "Seems we've hit a good one first time. Its conditions are fine for us. But keep alert. Now, outside and breathe planet air again."

They jumped from the ship's side, expanding themselves.

"Smell that grass!"

"Inhabited, you think?"

"It's been a long trip, Captain."

"Lucky at the end there. Thought we were going to dig in."

Reeves called the men about him, an official paper in his hand. "Landing-orders," he said. "They read as follows: *As Survey Ship One, patrolling outside the Earth's system, it is your selected duty to locate, sample, and mine any substances that read on Geiger meters types G and F. We remind you that within two years our enemies will have a ship capable of the flight you have just completed. It is essential that we maintain supplies of the above-mentioned substances if we are to survive in our fight against cruel tyranny and aggression.*"

The captain crumpled the paper in his hand. "A footnote congratulates us upon our courage and spirit," he added wryly. The crew grinned.

"Four men will come with me towards those hills," Reeves went on, nodding towards a range of softly rounded hills in the blue distance. "Mr. Watkins!" The first officer stepped forward. "Take four others and head in the opposite direction. Remainder of the crew will stay with the ship and repair that braking-jet. Radio-contact me every hour."

Soon the two parties moved away from the rocket, Reeves and Tom Stott, grey-haired navigation chief, walking slightly ahead of the younger men, listening to their excited chatter.

"See those colours! Kind of electric."

"It's a green and pleasant land, all right. Read at college that Earth used to look like this."

"What? Must have been a long time ago."

"About a hundred years."

They passed through a herd of miniature deer, tiny, exquisitely formed creatures, with glistening haunches and unafraid amber eyes. "These flowers . . . seem to grow as you look at them."

"Just smell that air!"

Several birds floated past, like bursts of coloured chalk.

"These meter needles are going mad."

"Our grateful government *will* be pleased."

The captain caught at Stott's arm. "Notice anything weird, Tom?"

"Only if you call landing in paradise weird."

"Look at the colours."

"They seem highly charged—electric, as Roberts just said."

"And the colour of those hills?"

"Brown, with yellow edges."

"Look *now*!"

"Blue again, with red lines running through them—and green patches."

"And the grass in front of us?"

"Green . . . yellow . . . now pink . . . now silver. So the planet rings interesting colour changes. Light-refraction! Any geologist could give you a dozen reasons. It's an interesting phenomenon, like the Martian Ice Lakes."

"Maybe, Tom. Maybe."

"You always were suspicious of new worlds, John."

Soon it was noon, and they walked through shrubland, the sun gently lighting their way, picking out flowers for them to see; flowers that bloomed coldly, astringently; flowers that bloomed hotly, sensually; but flowers that always bloomed very beautifully, softly shifting and changing their colours.

Late afternoon, and they were walking away from their shadows again, through languor and golden light.

Watkins's voice grated from the radio disk. "Meters are popping open, Captain. This planet is loaded with substances."

"Any signs of thinking life?"

"No, sir. The men are beginning to think we didn't land safely after all, and this is Heaven."

Then it was twilight, a purple dusk, against which the changing colours spun more vividly, washing, sparking, flickering from beneath their feet, and away, away, leaping, twittering, sliding, like a sea of many-coloured fish.

" Why? " muttered Reeves.

" Why ask why? " Stott breathed in the perfumed air. " Goodness, John, you'll ask Saint Peter why Heaven is where it is, when you get there."

" I like to know." Reeves frowned through the tinted air. " We've been on too many planets to think they're all that they seem. They have tricks. They dress up. They're pretty. But they're tricky. I just like to know what I'm facing."

Two days later, on a small hill a mile or so from the ship, where the meters clacked their loudest, the men erected plastic tents and began to analyse earth samples.

" Can't understand you at all, John," said Stott, that evening, as he and Reeves lay on the grass outside the captain's tent. " This is the closest I've ever been to paradise. It's a spaceman's haven. Here a man can stretch out and feel big again."

He pillowed his head on his arms and regarded the stars. " For fifteen years we've been coiled up inside steel ships, and that's a long time to spend waiting for the last bump. Remember that song we used to sing at the training school? The one about a grave in space and the dead captain who floated in it for a million years? How did it go? Just a speck of something in a sea of nothing, bobbing along in the wake of anything that happens along . . . roughly that. Well, I feel I've had all my luck in fifteen years. When I pass out I want six feet of good solid earth packed tight around me. Something I can hold on to."

" I know, I know. But not here, Tom. It's not the place."

" Why not? No war. No politicians feeding you mush and working you like puppets. Only peace and fresh meat, and a tree you can stretch out and touch when you feel like it."

Reeves pulled a blade of grass and nibbled the sweetness from it. " It's too—propitiatory."

Stott snorted. " It's perfect."

" Perhaps that's it. Perhaps I've grown out of perfect things —things that don't snarl and claw and hit back when you touch them. Perhaps. I don't know." As he spoke, he watched the colours swirl grey and dark about him.

Stott rose with a yawn. " Well, I'm for bed. There's a small bird that sits on my tent all night, singing the sweetest lullabies you ever heard. What a place! " He walked away on a carpet of jubilant reds and yellows.

Left alone, Captain Reeves thought it all out again. Logically there was no cause for his uncertainty. None. So far as the eye could see and the brain could reason, the planet was all peaches and cream. Propitiatory, he had said. He remembered times

when he had felt propitiatory, and discovered the emotion had always been preceded or followed by a destructive act. For thinking beings. But a planet? How?

He groaned, his brain refusing to function; so he relaxed and permitted his imagination to wander free about the planet.

He saw people on it. People who developed as he had, through the sea and the soil; who had tired of working for their bread, preferring to turn to a few technologies for an easier, richer harvest. He saw the rule of the machine set in and the face of the planet stifled with steel and concrete until, eventually, the race reached the point where they made even their food in crucibles and factories.

Only one use remained for the soil then—that of a testing-ground for new weapons developed by the Machine Age. The people spat radio-activity into the soil, making it sterile, filling it with so much unhealthy waste that they too perished.

All this he saw as he lay there, the colours burning through him, like flame. Then he saw something else. A strange sentience growing in the structure of the planet itself, an evil thing, born of mutated substances, with intention and direction. Creating itself. To hate! For revenge!

With these goals it had replenished itself. To these purposes it had organized itself, building a giant system of communications, using the coloured juices and saps of its members, and every atom of its bulk.

This done, it had only to wait.

And three days ago, thought Reeves, perhaps a billion years later, we arrive. We scream in from space, with one braking-jet out of action, crouching for the last bump. Instead, the planet adjusts its gravity, sets us down lightly, safely. It hears me read the landing-orders, learns why we are here, and chuckles through itself, and says, *At last!*

Revenge, phase one, begins. Seduction. Everything is made perfect for us. The grass lifts us as we walk. The plants bloom as we gaze and throw their most delectable scents at us. Deer jostle each other to provide food. The sun, the sky, the wind, all these work together.

Why? To degrade us! To make us slothful. To blunt our action level. To make us, as men once made it—unclean.

And then? what then? Phase two?

Reeves stood, the colours sliding questioningly about him.

He shouted, "*Death!*"

The word was seized by a blade of grass which, turning silver, fed it into the soil beneath, which shot it through its length, through its hills and trees and flowers, all silvering as they

passed the word, speeding it onwards to the sea, and through it in a ripple of vivid light, and out again, over continents, and through the purple night, and all over and back to his feet, to lie there. Silver. *Death!*

The next day, beneath a sun that was neither too hot nor too cold, and in a breeze that was neither too violent nor too cloying, the crew fought among themselves. One man fell, cracking his head against a rock.

Later, as they stood round the grave, watching gorgeous blooms of silver and purple unfold sympathetically over the dark brown earth, the captain examined every man there.

He saw change. Their hard disciplined lines had gone. The ground force had pulled their flesh into paunches, had bowed their backs, and wrinkled their uniforms. Their eyes were sullen and listless, and several of them had not bothered to shave.

After the short space-manual service, the captain ordered them all into the rocket, carefully shutting the door of the soundproof radio-room behind them to close out the listening grass. He told them his ideas about the planet. After a short silence they began to agree with him.

"I feel that, too, sir," nodded young Roberts. "Those flowers on the grave bloomed too damned quickly."

"We're living an opium dream all right," said Stott. "But how are we going to blast off? If the planet can adjust its gravity to set us down, it can certainly stop us from leaving."

"So there's a problem we've got to solve." The captain stared through the thick windows at the distant mountains. "Let's play it easily, slowly. It won't be simple."

Next morning, Captain Reeves reprimanded the first officer for the state of the ship, speaking loudly and with heat. Then he paraded the crew. "And just to remind you that you're spacemen and not a bunch of sloppy planet-stickers," he roared, "there'll be a trial flight this afternoon. We'll do two circuits of the planet. God help any man who muffs his job!"

The crew grumbled loudly as they worked. "Why bother?" asked Roberts. "I don't want to go anywhere. This is home for me."

"That's right!" agreed Taylor, winking at the sudden warmth of colour about them. "Who does he think he is? Throwing his weight about out here!"

So that afternoon the ship took off and began to circle in orbit. The captain sat in the radio-room with his senior officers, watching the instruments spin in the newly assembled panel. "Just feel that hold," he said.

" Like a cat gripping a mouse between its paws," grunted Stott. " This is going to take some time."

When, three hours later, the ship sank back onto the earth, the sun emerged from behind a bank of clouds, and the colours, which had turned sombre at their departure, suddenly glowed and sparkled anew.

This flight became a daily drill, but every day the crew continued to erect wooden huts on the hill, commenting thankfully on the permanence of the structures. They also built gardens, planting late-blooming bulbs, and betting with each other on the probable date of flowering. Several expeditions surveyed a nearby forest, marking a number of trees for future demolition.

At first, the crew regarded it as a game, smiling as they watched their admiring words transmitted through the planet to some central core in joyous flips of brilliance. Soon, however, the pleasure palled; the game became a task, and the crew had to work at it grimly, as a man must work to make love to an undesired partner.

On the planet there were voices. " Another game, Roberts? " " All right. One more." " Chip me in, too."

And miles above, the silver ship cruised smoothly in orbit.

" Now! " gestured the captain.

Levers slammed forward, building greater power, swooping the ship upwards into a wider arc. The crew stood, watching the swinging meters, aware of the sudden tightening of gravity.

Six seconds from free flight, read the gravity control, *five* . . . *four* . . . *three* . . . The invisible claws strengthened their hold just a little. *Two* . . . *one* . . .

" We're away! " shouted Roberts, from his post in the nose of the ship, " we've done it! "

" Fool! " The captain spun in fury.

" Sir? "

A sudden stab of red in the thin atmosphere outside the ship, striking downwards, breaking into a billion coloured fragments that diffused through the whole fabric of the globe, within four seconds.

The planet suffused itself in dubious browns and perplexed reds. It realized the ship was going farther out than ever before. Yet men remained on the planet, for their voices filtered through the communications system. This situation, it realized, was not black and white. It was grey and therefore needed to be worked out. All this took one second to establish.

And that second was enough. The ship burst free from the atmosphere and was away in the blackness.

Stott shouted, "God!" And Roberts stammered, "Sir—I . . ."

" Forget it, Roberts," bellowed the captain, laughing, " forget it! "

The crew smiled, felt sick, trembled, and looked ahead, into free blackness.

On the planet, colours crowded about the voices. " *Another game, Roberts?*" " *All right. One more.*" " *Chip me in, too.*"

The grass silvered. It listened again.

" *Another game, Roberts?* " " *All right. One more.*" " *Chip me . . .*"

Then it knew. It *knew.* It went blood-red mad.

It tore aside the hut and pulled a tape-recorder to the ground, and crushed its spinning reels with rocks. It savaged the gardens and splintered the rest of the huts and ripped the tents and killed the fine blooms on the man's grave, replacing them with obscene weeds. Colours flickered frantically and the seas churned in their depths.

Then, in a second, summer was erased by a cruel autumn, and the last leaf was barely brown before it was wrenched away by a shrieking winter. Then spring appeared again, its greens blooming immediately into a tiny summer, which lived for a fraction of time before autumn roared in again, followed by a white winter, thawed viciously by a new spring, burnt by another summer, desolated by a blurred autumn. Season raced mad season, and it was a world of chaos.

At last, a bank of grey cloud lifted from the stricken earth, and the planet was hidden. And with just a little more hatred in its heart, it began to replenish itself again for the long waiting.

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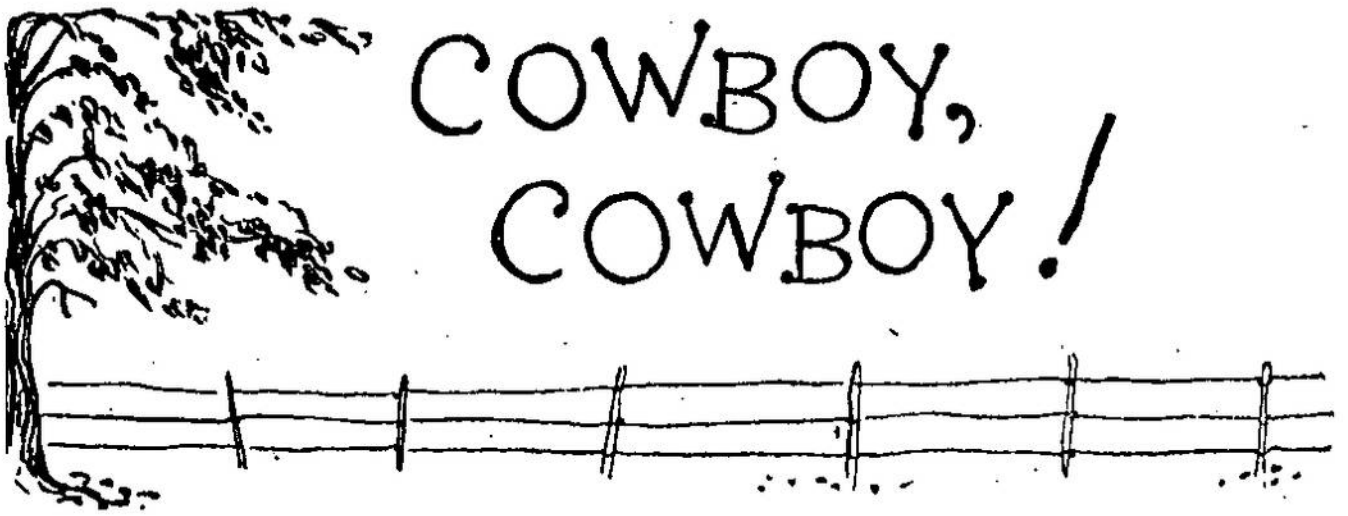


I heard a cowboy ride over the range
And the song he sang was wonderful strange

Come sell your pony, cowboy—
Sell your pony to me;
Braided bridle and your puncher saddle
And spend your money free.

" If I should sell my pony,
And ride the range no more,
Nail up my hat and my silver spurs
Above my shanty door . . ."

As I came down the sweet-grass range
And by the cabin-door,
I heard a singing in the early dusk
Along the river shore;

I heard a singing to the early stars,
And the tune of a pony's feet.
The joy of the riding singer
I never shall forget.

EDWIN FORD PIPER, *Sweet-Grass Range*

If He was a Cowboy

The Pss: made a most favourable impression upon every body but not more so than was deserved for I never saw in any one more grace & dignity & aplomb. Her eyes & the tip of her nose were a tiny bit red & accounted for by her having cried all the morng: at leaving her mother, for ever, as she must feel. She said to one of the Princesses " you perhaps think that I like marrying your Brother for his position but if he was a cowboy I shd: love him just the same & wd: marry no one else."

LORD CLARENDON, *Letter, March 10, 1863*

Skirting the Question

Lucy dismounted reluctantly. What would he say about the riding-habit that she wore? She felt very curious to learn, and shyer than ever before, and altogether different. The skirt made her more of a girl, it seemed.

"Hello, Lin!" she called.

"Good mornin'—Lucy," he replied, very slowly. He was looking at her, she thought, with different eyes. And he seemed changed, too . . . and his tall, lithe rider's form, his lean, strong face, and his dark eyes were admirable in her sight. Only this morning, all because she had worn a girl's riding-skirt instead of boy's chaps, everything seemed different. Slone gazed so long at her that Lucy could not keep silent. She laughed. "How do you like—me—in this?"

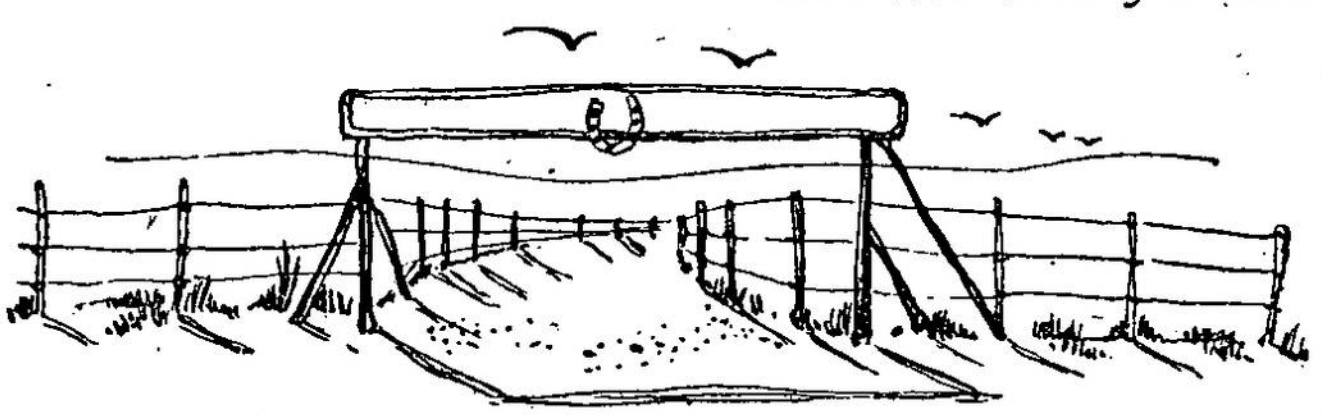
"I like you much better," Slone said, bluntly.

ZANE GREY, *Wildfire*

Git Along, Git Along

As I was a-walking one morning for pleasure,
I spied a cow-puncher all riding along;
His hat was throwed back and his spurs was a-jingling,
And he approached me, a-singing this song:
Whoopee ti yi yo, git along, little dogies,
It's your misfortune, and none of my own.
Whoopee ti yi yo, git along, little dogies,
For you know Wyoming will be your new home.

American Cowboy Ballad



South of the Border

" He left suddenly for abroad last night."
" For abroad! Where?"
" For Mexico, I believe."
" Mexico! But what for? Why Mexico?"
" The English have a proverb, ' Conscience makes cowboys of us all.' "
" I didn't know Wratislav had a conscience."
" My dear Sophie, he hasn't. It's other people's consciences that send one abroad in a hurry."

" SAKI," *Wratislav*

Seat in the Sky

I'm up in the mornin' before daylight
And before I sleep the moon shines bright.
Singin' Ki yi yippi yappi yay, yappi yay!
Singin' Ki yi yippi yappi yay!

Oh it's bacon and peas 'most every day
I'd as soon be a-eatin' prairie hay.

I'll drive them cattle to the top of the hill,
I'll kiss that gal, gol darn I will.

My seat is in the saddle and my hand is on the horn,
I'm the best dam cowboy that ever was born.

With my knees in the saddle and my seat in the sky
I'll quit punching cows in the sweet by and by.
Singin' Ki yi yippi yappi yay, yappi yay!
Singin' Ki yi yippi yappi yay!

The Lone Star Trail

MR. LINSEED'S CLOCK

It was too late—the damage was done

BY GERALD BULLETT

WHEN I was a boy, which is a long time ago now, I lived in a London suburb about six miles from King's Cross. Barnard Hill, as I shall call it, was little more than a village when we first went there; and though by the time I was fifteen it had greatly expanded, it still retained, here and there, relics of its rural past. The most interesting of these, in my estimation, was Mr. Linseed's dark little shop.

It was a narrow, timber-fronted building, squeezed in between two others of more modern design, and situated on the crest of the dangerously steep Barnard Hill Road, up and down which heavily-laden horse-drawn traffic ventured at its peril. That, you might think, was eminence enough; but Mr. Linseed's shop had the further distinction of being raised some four feet above street level, so that to enter it one had to mount five ancient stone steps, worn by the feet of many generations. The interior was dark and narrow and low-ceiled, and filled with the ticking of innumerable clocks.

All this, you must understand, held a peculiar fascination for me, from the moment when my father gave me the entry of the place by sending me with his watch to be mended. I had the childish fancy that all the time in the world was manufactured in this queer little shop.

But the oddest thing of all was Mr. Linseed himself. That, I need hardly say, was not his real name. For reasons that will presently appear, I think it best to present him to you under an alias. It is most improbable that he is still alive, but there may, for all I know, be surviving relatives, and I prefer to be on the safe side.

I had seen him often enough before; for my way to and from school took me past the shop, and by standing on tiptoe, one could sometimes catch sight of him through the window, bending over his bench, a little old man with leathery cheeks, prominent ears, and a large head upon which was perched a close-fitting

skull-cap of black silk. But it wasn't till I took him my father's watch that I made his personal acquaintance.

My pushing open the shop door set the bell briefly jangling, and when its echoes had died away I stood listening entranced to the clock voices all around me, and so was startled when suddenly, noiselessly, Mr. Linseed popped up behind the counter.

"Well, young gentleman?"

I explained my business. The watch was a gold hunter—a kind one hardly ever sees nowadays outside a museum. Mr. Linseed snapped it open and examined the works through a tiny magnifying-glass which he stuck in his left eye.

"Ah," said Mr. Linseed, "I see he's got a chill on the liver. No wonder he stopped going."

"A chill on the liver, did you say?"

"Yes, indeed. But it might have been worse," said Mr. Linseed. "It might have been double pneumonia, with this east wind." I laughed, but Mr. Linseed didn't.

He had a way of saying the most preposterous things with perfect gravity, without so much as a twinkle. He was, in short, a "character," and I enjoyed his company very much.

After that first encounter I often looked in to see him, with or without excuse. He was a master of his craft and made no difficulty about letting me watch him at work. Though he never smiled so far as I could see, I got the impression that he was a kindly, good-natured creature, and that his rather grotesque appearance did not do him justice. He was full of strange opinions, and flattered me by taking an interest in my school progress. We soon became good friends.

If only I had kept him to myself, all would have been well. But, being a boy, I had to talk about him. I talked about him to Jackman, with whom I shared a desk at school, and naturally the comic aspect of my new acquaintance lost nothing in the telling. Jackman was interested. He was too much interested. He insisted on coming to inspect Mr. Linseed for himself. I tried to head him off; I wished I had held my tongue; but it was too late, the damage was done. How much damage I mercifully didn't know—until later.

Jackman was by no means my boon companion. Indeed, I didn't particularly like him. He was loud-voiced, much given to noisy jocularity—hence his nickname, Jackass—and a bit of a bully. It was only the accident of our juxtaposition in class that had forced us into a sort of friendship. He was a year older than I, and big for his age: a dark, gipsy-looking fellow with a saturnine countenance. I, I regret to say, had the reputation of a swot. Jackman found me a useful neighbour to crib from.

" He's quite a decent old boy, Mr. Linseed is," I told Jackman, as we approached the shop. " So mind you don't play the jackass, Jackass! "

Jackman, who saw I was nervous, grinned broadly but said nothing. A moment or two later we were in the presence.

" I've brought a friend to see you, Mr. Linseed. This is Jackman."

" How do you do, Master Jackman? " said Mr. Linseed courteously.

Feeling some explanation to be necessary, I said, " He sits next to me at school, you know."

" I see," said Mr. Linseed. " Very agreeable for you both."

" About the feet," said Jackman. It was one of his stock phrases.

" A word in your four ears, young gentlemen," said Mr. Linseed earnestly. " Don't you believe all they tell you at school. They don't know as much as they pretend."

Then he did an unprecedented thing. He removed his skull-cap. The effect was sensational. His head, smooth and yellow like old ivory, was utterly hairless. I dared not look at Jackman, but I felt him nudging me, heard his spluttering giggle. And before I could think of anything to say that would save the situation, he broke into characteristic speech.

" Have you tried boiling it, Mr. Linseed? "

" I don't understand you, sir," said Mr. Linseed.

" The old egg-head," explained Jackman. " Try boiling it four and a half minutes."

For the first time in my experience, Mr. Linseed smiled. The quality of that smile made me shudder. Jackman, very pleased with himself, burst into a loud guffaw. Bitterly ashamed, I hustled him out of the shop, walked a few yards with him in speechless anger, and then made an excuse for going back alone.

" Please, Mr. Linseed . . ." I began.

" Back again? Where's your young friend? " Mr. Linseed was still smiling, with what I can only describe as a gentle malignancy.

" He's a frightful ass, Jackman is," I stammered. " I'm sorry he was so rude to you."

" Never mind, my boy," said Mr. Linseed, in honeyed accents. " He'll never be rude to me again."

From a shelf behind him he lifted down a small brass carriage-clock, which he placed on the counter between us. " Now here's a nice little timepiece," he said. " I shall call it Master Jackman, in memory of our dear friend. It's an eight-day clock, and I wind it up every Monday, at teatime, after closing the shop."

"Today's Monday," I reminded him.

"Precisely," said Mr. Linseed. "Now if by any chance I should forget to wind it this afternoon, what will happen, I wonder?"

"The clock will stop," I suggested.

"Dear me! So it will. Wouldn't that be a pity?"

It was clear to me now, more by his facial expression than by anything he said, that Mr. Linseed was a little dotty. I had sometimes suspected it before; now I was certain.

After a few more exchanges, and a repetition of my apology, I made my escape and tried to put the thought of him out of my mind. In this endeavour I was pretty successful. There were, after all, plenty of other things to think about, including not only my school work and an impending exam, but a new pair of football boots of which I was inordinately proud. Not until the afternoon of the next day, Tuesday, did my mind revert to Mr. Linseed.

During the last fifteen minutes of school I began to notice a change in my deskmate Jackman. The subject was algebra, which we both disliked very much, and the master in command was Mr. Stark, a tall, dark, lantern-jawed personage of whom we stood in some awe. His formidable presence, however, had not until now deterred the irrepressible Jackman from engaging me in whispered conversation, and we had already suffered rebuke. But now he was not only silent but unaccountably listless, and making no pretence of working.

When I had finished the set problem, a quadratic equation, I glanced round at him to see how he was getting on. He sat slumped forward, apparently asleep, his face pillowed on the desk.

At the same moment the voice of Mr. Stark boomed forth: "Jackman! Have you actually the audacity to *sleep* during class?"

But if Jackman was asleep, it was no ordinary sleep. I was sure of that. He was deathly still. One arm hung limp and lifeless over the side of the desk. His mouth, which had fallen open, emitted no sound or sign of breathing.

There flashed into my mind a vision of Mr. Linseed in his dark little shop. A queer smile glittered in his eyes. And on the counter before him stood that small brass timepiece, ticking no longer.

My hand shot up. "Please, sir, I think Jackman's ill."

Then there was commotion indeed: gasps of excitement and a scrabbling of feet as the boys left their seats and came crowding round us. Mr. Stark, in three strides, clove through them, pushing them angrily out of his way.

"Silence, everyone! And get back to your places this instant!"

He bent over the unconscious Jackman, loosened his collar, placed a hand on his forehead, and seemed to listen.

"Please, sir!" said Brownlow, eager to be helpful.

"Be quiet, boy!"

"But please, sir," Brownlow persisted, "is he alive, sir? Is he breathing? I tell you what, sir: he's got a sun-catcher, sir. Keeps it in his waistcoat pocket, sir. If you hold it to his nose . . ."

There was a loud buzz of assent. We all knew that sun-catcher. It was a fragment of broken looking-glass with which it had been Jackman's delight to entrap a ray of sunshine and direct it into the eyes of whoever at the moment it pleased him to annoy.

"Good idea, Brownlow," said Mr. Stark, relaxing his severity.

He acted on it without delay. The sun-catcher was fished from Jackman's pocket and the test applied. He was found to be still breathing.

"We must get him to bed," announced Mr. Stark. "Go and tell Matron, one of you. And send for the doctor. *One* of you, I said. We don't want a stampede. You, Brownlow!"

"Yes, sir, thank you, sir," said Brownlow, bounding for the door. It was Brownlow's great day.

Jackman and I were day-boys, but we had boarders as well at our school, which therefore boasted an infirmary, or "san" as we called it. To that haven of quietness we carried Jackman on an improvised stretcher, the detachable top of a small trestle table.

"And now," said Mr. Stark absurdly, when the class reassembled, "you will all get on with your work as if nothing had happened."

Jackman was not a particularly popular boy. His audacities were applauded, but by his juniors he was as much feared as admired. But everyone, now that he was struck down, felt warmly towards him. His condition compelled sympathy, and how could we be other than grateful to one who had not only disrupted our algebraical exercises but given us into the bargain one of the most exciting afternoons of our lives?

As for me, with my secret knowledge, I was already revolving a plan in my mind. A bold and difficult plan, but, as I told myself, quoting from a play in which I had seen the great Martin-Harvey, it was The Only Way. The question was whether I should be in time. It was to be, clearly, a Race with Death. The phrase gave me horrific satisfaction.

In something less than an hour, just before school was dismissed for the day, Jackman's parents arrived, a nurse was installed, and the doctor, after earnestly conferring with them,

took his leave. All this happened off-stage, so far as we boys were concerned, and it was not until the next morning that the bulletins came trickling through the heavy blanket of official discretion.

Young Jackman, we were given to understand, was in a coma, which my dictionary told me was *a state of extreme insensibility*. His disease, if he had one, was obscure, unidentifiable; and whether he would live or die was an open question. We were commanded, on pain of the severest penalties, to say nothing about it outside the school, even to our parents.

To make the impossible injunction more palatable we were " put on our honour " and assured that provided we were loyal to the school—" And I'm sure you're all good fellows at heart," said the headmaster, after morning prayers—we should be kept informed of the situation from day to day.

In the years that have followed I have often been tempted to see the hand of an invisible designer in the events that ensued. But however that may be, fortune certainly favoured my plan, which at first had seemed scarcely possible of achievement.

On the way home that same day I had called on Mr. Linseed and with careful casualness had asked to see once again that little brass clock. And there it was, still standing on the counter, its hands fixed at half past two, the precise moment of Jackman's strange seizure.

" And how is your dear little friend today? " inquired Mr. Linseed, rubbing his hands together in what seemed to me sinister glee.

" Jackman? Oh, he's all right," I said. " What's the *price* of the clock, Mr. Linseed? I've taken a fancy to it."

" To you, seeing we're friends, boy, twenty-five shillings."

My heart sank.

If he had said twenty-five pounds it could hardly have been worse. " Would you take the money in instalments? " I asked him timidly.

His small eyes glittered.

" Certainly, my dear."

" Then can I have the clock now? "

" Ah no. Not till the money's in my hand. It wouldn't be right, with a young fellow like you. Besides, I've a use for this clock."

" What sort of use? It's not even going."

" So Master Jackman's enjoying good health, is he? Now isn't that lucky for him? "

" Look, Mr. Linseed," I said persuasively, " if you'll wind it up and get it going, I'll buy it. Honest I will."

" And the money—have you got it on you, dear child? "

"But," I plausibly protested, "you can't expect me to buy a clock that's not going."

"I don't expect it, my little man. *I'm* in no hurry to sell. Twenty-five shillings and it's yours. What a bargain at the price!"

There was perhaps some truth in that, though money, you must remember, was worth at least three times as much then as it is today.

Was it chance, or the operation of Providence, that sent my Uncle Stephen to spend a night with us at this critical juncture? He was the most meritorious of my uncles, always good for a half-crown tip; and this time, on leaving us, he excelled himself, and won my everlasting gratitude, by slipping me five shillings.

"Something for your money-box, my boy," said he.

"There!" exclaimed my mother admiringly. "Isn't that kind of your uncle! You'll put it in the bank, dear, won't you, against a rainy day?"

I grinned sheepishly, saying nothing, allowing silence to pass for consent. In fact, I was unbearably excited. My mother's remark had given me an idea.

Uncle Stephen, though the chief, was not my only source of unexpected revenue. There were other uncles, and a sprinkling of aunts too, all of whom had the excellent habit of bestowing silver pieces on me from time to time. As I had a weekly sixpence in pocket-money from my father, it was an unwritten law that these heaven-sent windfalls should be paid into my Post Office Savings account instead of being spent and enjoyed. I secretly resented that, but now I rejoiced in it retrospectively, perceiving that my enforced parsimony was for once to prove useful.

The very next morning, before school, I took drastic action. Getting possession of my Savings Book involved the minor felony of going without permission to the drawer of my mother's writing-desk in which it was kept; but I committed the crime without scruple, confident that nothing less than a human life was at stake.

Whether it was so or not, others must decide if they can: I am concerned only with telling my story.

With the two half-crowns clinking in my pocket I entered the Post Office, produced my precious book, and fearfully, though with every appearance of boldness, drew out the small sum that stood to my credit, which was, believe it or not, precisely one pound, the accumulated treasure of some years.

My next and last interview with Mr. Linseed—for I took care never to go near him again—was brief and triumphant. He

teasingly tried to talk me out of my fancy, but with all his queerness he was a man of his word, and finding me resolute, he soon gave way. The clock was duly wound up and handed over to me. I carried it with me to school, very conscious of the bulge in my pocket.

From time to time I took it out, to make sure it was still going. It was, and it told me that I should be late for school.

During the eleven-o'clock break, Brownlow, bursting with importance, came sidling up to me.

"You know old Jackman?"

"Yes?"

"Well, he's better. He's come round."

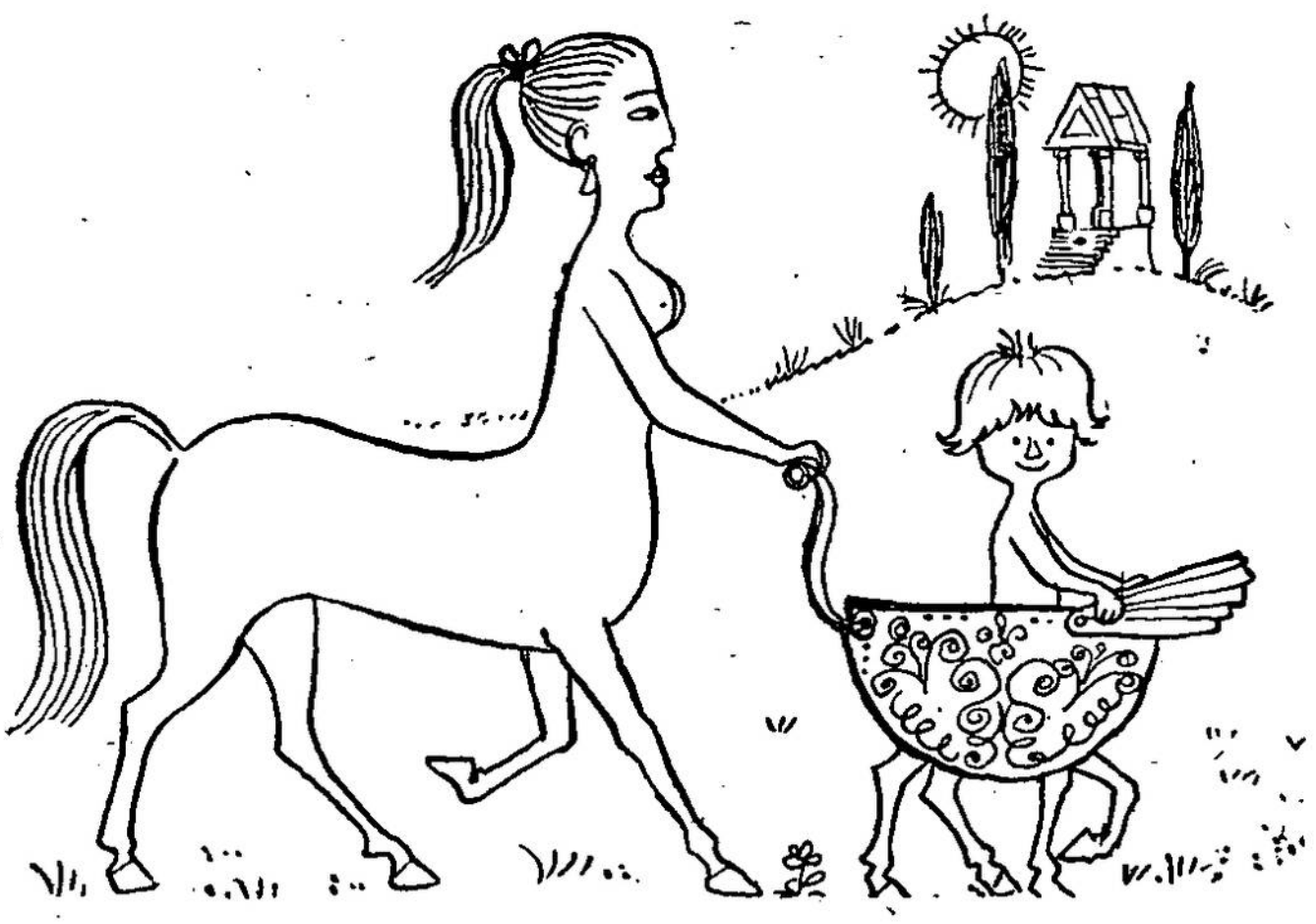
"Yes," I answered composedly, "I know."

"Liar!" said Brownlow, deeply indignant. "No one knows except me and old Stark. He's just come from the san. He told me."

"All the same, I did know," I assured him. "As a matter of fact I knew before anyone else did. At five past nine this morning, if you're interested," I added cockily.

"Don't talk so wet!" said Brownlow. "As if you could! You haven't got second sight, have you?" I realized, just in time, that my tactics were mistaken, and that anything in the way of explanation would be more than inconvenient.

"All right," I said grinning. "Keep your hair on, you ass! I was only having you on toast."



WHISPER IN THE DARK

Her soft words echoed
like a drumbeat in his mind

BY MICHAEL SAYERS

THE King was a swarthy, tall, full-blooded man in his early thirties. His virtue was his courage; his weakness was his pride. He had married when still a prince, while his father was alive, and his Queen was about the same age as himself, a golden-haired, rosy-fleshed young woman who adored her husband and about whose conduct no whisper of court scandal was ever heard.

The King had a Jester named Moi-Même who was his exact double, though no one ever remarked upon this except the Jester himself, for although the Fool resembled the King in certain details of physical appearance, their characters were so vastly different that no one could ever mistake the one for the other.

The King carried himself like a soldier and a king: his brown eyes flashed; his movements were brusque and energetic; and he held his royal head erect, so that his black beard pointed upwards. Moi-Même the Jester had brown eyes, too, but they lacked lustre; he shambled rather than walked, and his beard pointed darkly downwards like the blade of a dagger directed at his own heart.

Sometimes the Jester would grow overexcited from wine or the violent exercise of his own wit and then he would jump around the court-room, among the laughing courtiers, buffeted by kicks and blows, screaming, " I'm the King! I'm the King! "

And sometimes he became so overwrought by this screaming jest of his that the King had to call in the guards and have his demented Jester taken off to the dungeon and left there until his temper cooled.

The Queen disliked the Jester just as much as she loved the King. She found all his jests in bad taste and his physical appearance repulsive. The Jester for his part worshipped the Queen, followed her like a dog, and again and again he would crawl to her feet. When she thrust him away, he kissed her shoes and she was overcome with disgust. " Take him away! " she cried out, horrified, when the Jester crawled at her feet.

The King was disturbed. One day he asked his Queen, " Why do you dislike Moi-Même? He does you no harm."

But the Queen could not explain her hatred of the poor Jester. She was a tender-hearted woman and she began to wonder about it. " Can it be," she asked herself, " that I am *jealous* of the Jester? " She decided that this explained her hatred. " I love my husband so much," she assured herself, " that I am jealous even of the affections he lavishes on this mad Fool! "

This explanation greatly gratified the King when she told it to him, and it would seem that there was no happier couple anywhere than the King and his Queen.

However, things are not always as they seem to be. The King and the Queen were really bored with one another. They had married for love and not for state reasons, with the unhappy result that it was impossible for them, after their original passion had been sated, to enjoy one another's company.

Of course, they loved one another. Yet whenever the King looked at the Queen he saw the ugly mask of a fattening blonde woman in her thirties obscuring the fair bright maiden he had loved before marriage. And whenever the Queen looked at the King she saw, with saddened vision, the ghost of an ardent youth peering wanly from the prison house of this full-blooded, vulgar, busy man. In secret they both sighed for what was not, and therefore they were not happy.

The Queen consoled herself with her domestic affairs in the castle and her sewing and embroidering. She read romantic novels and listened to music. The King hunted, engaged in military manœuvres, travelled on royal missions, and increasingly spent his time at home in the company of his beloved Jester.

The King's addiction to his Jester, indeed, had become notorious. Often in the midst of the most serious counsels he would leave the company with Moi-Même, his arm around the Jester's neck, and wander off into the woods or some remote corner of the castle, utterly neglecting his royal affairs.

The Chief Counsellor, especially, resented the King's indifference to state matters and attributed this to the evil influence of Moi-Même. He suspected the Jester of harbouring hidden political ambitions, and the Chief Counsellor was determined to put a stop to this before it developed any further.

He spoke to the Queen, urging her to use her influence with the King to dismiss the evil clown.

" Alas, sir," replied the Queen, " I have no influence with the King in this affair."

" Would you, then, speak to the Jester? " asked the Chief Counsellor.

"To the Jester?" exclaimed the Queen, repelled by the very thought.

"If you commanded him to absent himself from the presence of the King, he would obey you."

The Queen thought a moment. "I will speak to the Jester," she said.

When Moi-Même was brought before her, the Queen drew her skirts away and began coldly: "Hear me, Moi-Même! It is my wish—"

The Jester always kept his sad dark eyes lowered in the presence of the Queen, but when he heard his name spoken by her he was taken unawares. She had never addressed him before. So now he looked at her.

"I was about to say—" said the Queen. Unaccountably she stopped, while the Jester humbly waited, adoring her with his sad eyes. "I was about to say—"

But she never told what she had been about to say . . .

That night, at supper, the Jester was very excited. He burst into the crowded room, ran up to the head of the table where the King sat, and screamed, "I'm the King!"

Then, tearing at the King's cloak, he shrieked, "I'm the King! I'm the King!"

The King, laughing, tried to shake him off, but the Jester kept clinging to his cloak. The King picked up a full bowl of fresh cream and inverted it on the Jester's head, saying distinctly through the uproarious merriment of the assembly, "If you're the King, we must crown you!"

The Chief Counsellor was delighted. He believed that the King had grown tired of Moi-Même's jests at last and was about to dismiss him from the court. However, next morning the King left the Council Chamber abruptly in the middle of the most serious state affairs, and soon after was seen wandering off into the castle woods, and the arm of the Jester was around the royal neck.

It seemed that nothing could be done to rid the Court of this Jester, and the Chief Counsellor had almost reached the point of accepting the situation when he learnt a piece of unexpected intelligence. One of his spies in the castle, a chambermaid in the Queen's apartment, brought him the startling news.

It was nothing more or less than this: the Queen had taken a lover.

The Chief Counsellor was astounded, and then incredulous, and then convinced, and then alarmed. He told nobody about his intelligence, but after he had questioned the chambermaid

and extracted all the fantastic details a hundred times and more, he enjoined her to absolute silence, and gave secret orders to have her poisoned that night.

Next day he approached the King in the great hall of the castle. " I would speak with your Majesty alone."

" Come, Moi-Même! " cried the King to the Jester who was shambling around, mimicking the Chief Counsellor's scowling countenance. " We have private business with his Highness the Counsellor! "

" This is not for a Jester's ears! " said the Chief Counsellor, angered and impatient.

" Then it is not for mine! " said the King, while Moi-Même fell on the floor, shaking with silent mirth.

" Very well, then, Majesty! " said the Chief Counsellor, losing his temper altogether. " Your Queen is a whore! "

The words had scarcely left his lips when simultaneously the Chief Counsellor was assaulted from two sides.

The King had him by the throat and the Jester from behind was dragging him by the hair. The unfortunate man's eyes bulged, popped.

When the King took his hands away, the Jester held the whole burden of a dead man by the hair. The Jester let go, and the stately form of the Chief Counsellor slumped heavily to the polished floor.

Nothing was said about this incident, though naturally rumours like flames ran around among the courtiers. All that was known was that the Chief Counsellor had suddenly died. The court physician announced that it was a case of heart failure. An elaborate state funeral was arranged. The whole country was plunged into official mourning. Everyone wore black. And the King and Queen marched behind the catafalque in the funeral ceremony, and the Queen, being tender-hearted, wept.

Everyone regretted the loss of the Chief Counsellor except the chambermaid, who would surely have regretted it if she had stayed alive long enough to know about it, and the King and the Jester, who had murdered him in defence of the Queen's good name.

The King, for his part, did not give the Counsellor's death a second thought. However, he remembered what the Counsellor had said: " *Your Queen is a whore!* " It troubled him. He didn't believe it, of course, and yet the terrible phrase kept recurring in his mind. He couldn't sleep at night, thinking about it.

He no longer lay in the same chamber with the Queen. Her apartments were situated in the west wing of the castle. Late one night, without disturbing anyone, the King crept out of bed in

his nightshirt and went across the long corridor to the Queen's chamber. The guards were asleep outside the doors, and the King slipped in without being observed. He passed through a dim ante-room, opened a heavy door as silently as he could, and entered the Queen's bedchamber.

The night-torches had burnt down in the Queen's chamber, but the fire still glowed in the great carved hearth and its dim glow illuminated the white bed on which the Queen reposed. The King stole farther into the room. His wife lay on her back, her hand under her golden hair, and she was fast asleep and gently snoring.

The King slipped into the bed beside his wife, who woke as soon as she felt his touch, sighed, and enfolded him in a passionate embrace.

" Ah, my sweetheart, my honey, my own," she murmured rapturously, " I did not expect you tonight, but welcome, welcome to my arms, my sweet, my honey, my heart, my own! "

The King had not heard these endearments from his wife since the earliest nights of their marriage. He was astounded by the passion his wife showed for him, and recompensed it as well as he could.

She caressed his hair, his ears, his thighs, his beard. She sighed and whispered, " You are tired tonight! "

And this whisper froze his blood, for the King had not visited his wife for many months, and he imagined that in the darkness the Queen mistook him for another.

As soon as he could, he left her and returned to his own bed, meditating on the terrible whisper, which mingled in his anguished mind with the last words of the Chief Counsellor, making a constant drumming refrain which beat in his brain with maddening monotony: *You are tired tonight—your Queen is a whore! You are tired tonight—your Queen is a whore! You are tired tonight—your Queen is a whore!*

By the time he woke next morning the King knew beyond all doubt that his Queen had a lover. But who could he be? Carefully he watched her that day. She showed no sign of her secret on her round, rosy-skinned, blue-eyed, gold-framed face. Carefully he noted her look, her walk, her gestures. How she sat and rose; how she sighed; how she ate and how much; how she listened to the music she loved, letting her embroidery fall in her lap, her eyes half closed and far away, so that the King was sure that she was rapt in sensual memories of delicious episodes in the dark.

" My Queen is a whore," he told Moi-Même sadly.

But the Jester replied, brushing his fool's stick under the King's

nose, " If your Queen is a whore, then you are the Fool! "

There was not a man in the castle whom the King did not suspect of cuckolding him. He eyed them all with secret detestation, from the sleek courtiers and boyish pages to the burly men-at-arms, from the subtle grey-haired counsellors to the brutish grooms and stableboys. It seemed to him that they all smiled behind his back, and looked at him dishonestly.

But which man, among them all, shared the Queen's bed?

The King was determined to find out. He meditated upon horrible revenges. He was a hot-blooded man and had the temperament that could relish vengeance. It was a relief to his jealousy to imagine burnings, rackings, stabbings, cuttings, twistings, and other images of torture. He would burst into the chamber, sword in hand, surprise them, arrest them, bind them. And then the vengeance of the King would be something beyond imagination, a fable and a terror to all ensuing ages.

But first he had to catch the guilty couple in the act.

At night he could not sleep. His fevered mind whirled with images of violence through which the rose-and-golden vision of the Queen lying naked on her bed, her hand under her head, came to him again and again. Perhaps he had wronged her, after all!

The thought burst the tension in him, and flooded his darkened mind with blazing light. Of course! He was a wicked jealous fool! Moi-Même's words came back to him with new meaning, as so often happened with the words of the Jester. "*If your Queen is a whore, then you are the Fool!*"

But of course his Queen was not a whore, and he was the King, her husband, her lover, her sweet, her honey, her own! He thought again of her passion, the heat and allure of her flesh. How he had wronged her! What a fool he was, indeed!

Ecstatic with tenderness, the King leapt out of his bed in the darkness, groped hastily for a garment to cover his nakedness, and hastened to the Queen's chamber. As usual, the guards were asleep. He opened the heavy door and entered the room where his wife slept. The fire was brighter than the previous time and lit up the bed, where the King witnessed a sight that held him transfixed with astonishment.

It was dark at the doorway and he was standing behind the heavy entrance curtains, unseen. Bright in the firelight, the King saw his wife, sitting up in the huge canopied bed, her naked arms outstretched, and her golden hair flowing over her rosy shoulders.

Standing beside the bed, clear in the glowing light, stood the handsome youthful figure of a man. He wore a brocaded robe, and upon his head there was a golden crown. It was the King himself going to his beloved Queen as on their first wedded night!

Even as he watched, fascinated, with horrified eyes, the thunderstruck King saw his double at the bedside remove the golden crown and place it on a little table beside the bed. Then he took off his heavy robe. It fell to the floor, and the King saw his own body naked. The Queen leaned from the bed, embraced him, and drew him towards her.

The King's brain reeled at the sight, and for a second his mind failed. He recovered but, as if paralysed, he could not move, or take his horrified gaze from the terrible couple embraced in that white bed.

The Queen gave an amorous cry, and at this sound the King lost all control of himself. Opening his mouth, like a stricken beast in mortal agony, rooted to the spot by the paralysis that gripped him, he raised his clenched fists to his shoulders and let out a wild hoarse roar of mingled horror, incredulity, and rage.

The couple on the bed started apart. The Queen cried out.

The door behind the King suddenly burst open, and the frightened guards, roused from their doze, clustered around him, their spear-points burning in the firelight.

He found himself pinioned by strong hands. He struggled in the nightmare that was coming down on him, brushing him with its overwhelming wings.

" I am the King! I am the King! "

He heard the cool sharp voice of the Queen like an arrow piercing the confusion, tipped with the poison of abhorrence: " Take him away! "

The hands that held him wrenched him from the room. He was flung outside into the corridor. Gasping, struggling, he was borne down the corridor, another corridor, a passage, stairs, more stairs, steps, stone steps. They flung him into a dungeon.

He heard the iron door clang, the key rasp, the bolt shut. He flung himself at the iron door, tearing at it until his hands were full of blood. A lattice popped open in the iron door and a guard's face peered in. " Shut up, you fool! We're sleepy! "

" I'm the King! I'm the King! "

He heard the harsh mocking laughter of the guards, and the lattice slid closed.

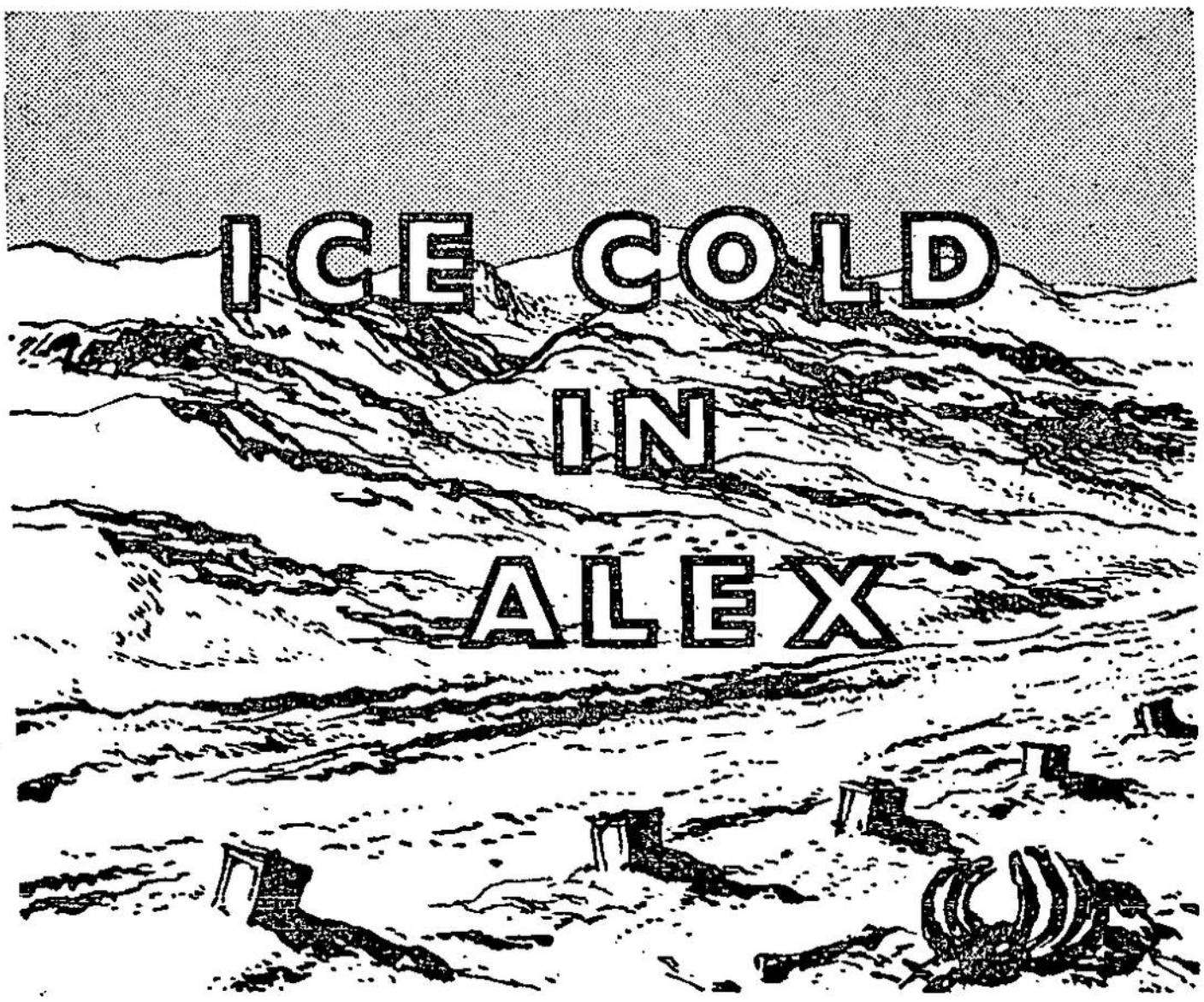
Incredulous, in the feeble glare of a smoky torch stuck on a spike overhead, he looked down and saw that the nightrobe he wore was the motley of Moi-Même.

* * *

CAUGHT OUT

People who throw kisses are mighty near hopelessly lazy.

BOB HOPE



Tense new drama of the Western Desert—

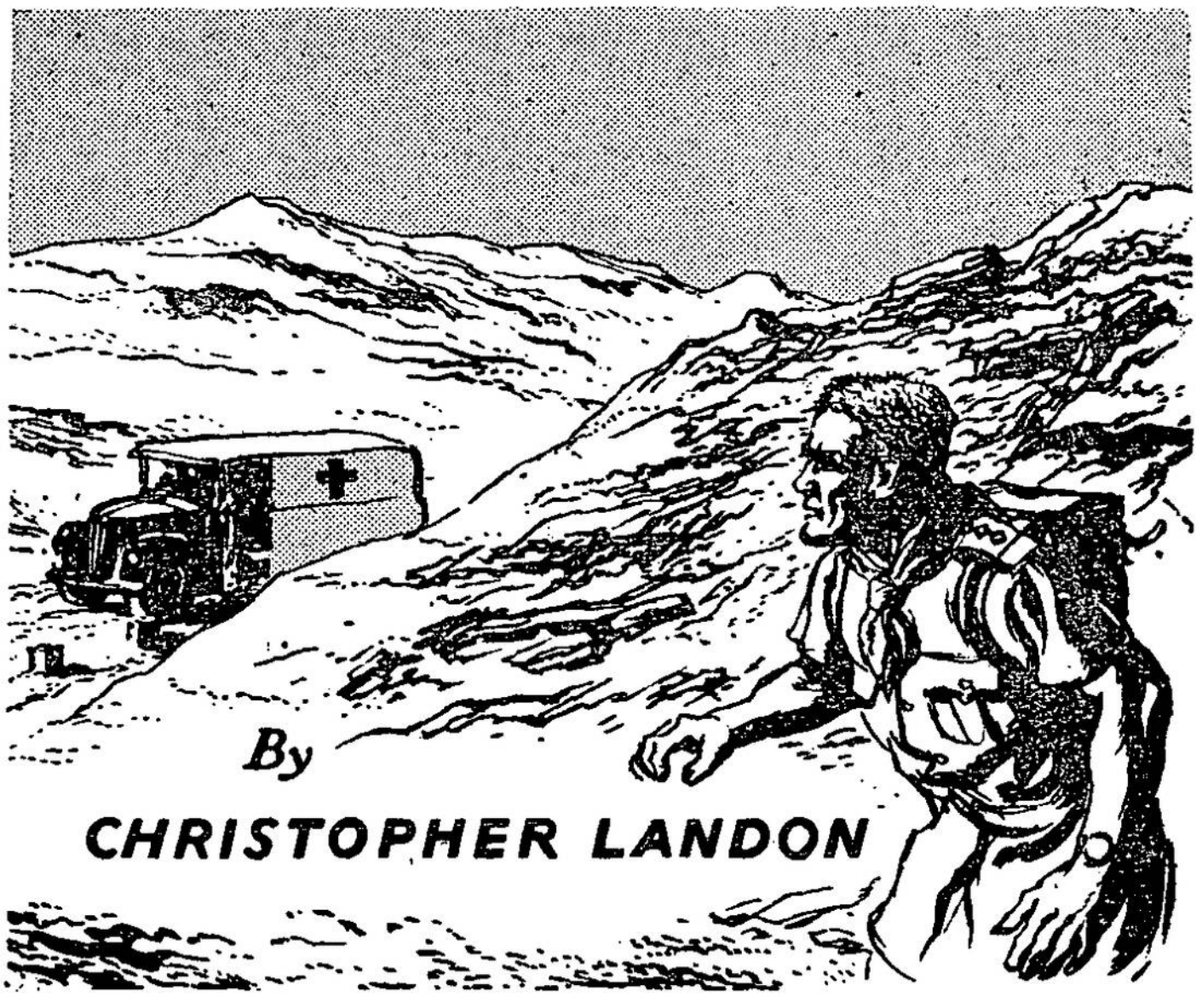
THEY served it ice-cold in Alex . . .

The moment that he shut his eyes, Captain Anson could see every detail of that little bar in the lane off Mahomet Ali Square: the marble-topped counter, the high stools, the Greek behind the bar. Then the sound of the place came back . . . the purr of the overhead fan, a fly buzzing drowsily, the muffled noise of the traffic seeping in through the closed door:

"If I think of that long enough, there might be a chance of forgetting this bloody noise—" But it didn't help.

Then he thought about the beer itself: in tall thin glasses, so cold that there was a dew glistening on the outside of them, even before they were put down on the counter; the pale amber clearness of it; the taste, last of all.

It did not help much. It did not shut out the sound of the endless shell that screamed over his head—only delayed the inevitable visit to the back of the truck for another whisky. Perhaps, more than anything, it made him realize that for the first time he was entirely afraid. Jerry had got a ring of their 88-millimetres right up now and were banging the shells onto the edge of the escarpment. The ricochets—perhaps they were doing it for that effect—were screaming out over Tobruk harbour in flat trajectory like a curtain of wailing rain.



By

CHRISTOPHER LANDON

Last out of Tobruk—three men, two girls

There had always been noise in Tobruk: in the first siege, the regular, expected pattern of bombing to be sworn at and endured; then, the lull of a year, with only daylight stuff coming over high from the west. But now, everything was back to where they came in—all the soft-skinned stuff coming back inside the perimeter, the noise of the guns getting closer and closer—

George Anson knew that the fear had come to stay now—not coming and then draining away, as it had for the last two days.

There had been no thought of a general retirement when the Germans started their attack on the Gazala line. Even when they got through in places, the scraps of information that got back to Tobruk were smoothed over with the comforting thought that the German armour was now boxed on the wrong side of the line, cut off from their own supplies, with no hope of repair, a sitting duck for our tanks to come in and squash, the moment they chose. The withdrawal of our ambulances from a forward position had followed as a routine movement: a little farther back from the battle would make them easier to control. It had been so casual that he had not even bothered to radio the orders; he had taken them up himself. It had been an excuse to escape from the monotony of Tobruk.

But as he was on his way back, something started to happen . . .

out there, to the south of him, as he motored back to the fortress, over the lip of the escarpment, in the flinty plain between Knightsbridge and Bir Hakim.

He heard the distant thunder of the guns as he drove. In the hours that followed, the breath of rumour swept through the fortress. Something had gone a bit adrift in the smashing-up of those Jerry tanks. 150 Brigade " box " had gone in the middle of the line, and the German transport was streaming through the breach to replenish their armour.

Like most of the rest that heard it, he didn't quite believe.

The first real personal impact came later, when the last report of the new disposition of the ambulances came in: there were three blanks—three that had been ordered to leave their old location far south on the line had not arrived at the new. He spent an hour hanging round the wireless truck with the C.O.—dapper, friendly Major Brooker, the only doctor in that odd formation, a Motor Ambulance convoy. The operator had twiddled his dials; three times they got a firm, laconic " no " from the new sites, but there was only silence and the crackle of static from the old sites where they had been.

At last, the Major had straightened and smiled. Then he said, " I'm going out to pull them in, George. Shan't be long—keep an eye on things." He had got into his car and given that half wave, half salute of his, and driven off towards the eastern perimeter, into the darkness in a stream of dust. And never came back.

The signal to report to the Medical Brigadier at Corps H.Q. came through at four. Captain Anson changed into a clean bush-shirt, had a quick pull at the bottle, and got into his Humber to drive down the hill. Everything was normal as he drove off the camp site and onto the road; the shelling had died in one of those uneasy lulls, and he was glad to see that the men had flattened a patch of desert and unrolled their strip of coconut matting for a cricket match. He stopped for a minute to watch the bowling—a couple of crafty leg-breaks. Then he let in the clutch and started down the road to Headquarters.

The Brigadier was a typical desert oddity: irascible, abrupt, shrewd, and a good Staff Officer. Medical Officers, even on the Staff, do not as a rule attract much attention, but " Dangle-toes " was a name, apart from this reference to his small stature.

He was very thin, and through some whim of hygiene, always kept his head shaved close to the scalp. At the moment Anson made entry to his dugout at Corps Headquarters, he had been sitting cross-legged in a tin bath, with nothing more on than a pair of rimless glasses. Anson had thought of Gandhi.

" Ah, Anson. Afternoon." He reached forward, fishing for something in the three inches of grey scummy muck that was a week's water ration.

" Good afternoon, sir."

" Well. Sit down. Let me finish this lot. How's everything? " He always spoke in jerks.

Anson sat on the one camp-chair and began the recital of the Unit's state. As he listened, the Brig still trawled the water in front of him with his hands: at last, with a grunt of satisfaction, he pounced to pull from the depths a fragment of what had once been a loofah. Without interruption, he began to scratch his back.

When Anson had finished, he said, " And there's no news about Major Brooker, or the ambulances? "

" None, sir. I don't think there is anywhere else to check. I've packed up all the kits. Shall I—? "

Outside there was a crump—crump—crump, as a stick of bombs dropped quite close. The water in the bath had shivered in little circles and some sand fell with a soft noise from the sides of the dugout. The Brig had not moved, except to lift one arm and explore the mysteries beneath it.

Anson's fingers had been slowly relaxing from the grip he had on the under side of the chair. The Brig had shot a quick glance at him and gone on scratching.

" I think I'd like a drink, Anson—and I expect you could do with one too. The Scotch is on the table. There's the water bottle. No, not that one—the next. That's real Charing Cross." In the desert, the merit of various wells was judged as fine as a vintage.

When he had handed down a mug to the bath, his hand had stopped shaking. The Brig went on talking as if there had been no interruption.

" Poor Brooker. I'm afraid he's had it. We shan't hear anything now. You are to be temporary O.C. by the way. I can't find a doctor that's suitable to take over—and your R.A.S.C. don't object, so you can carry on." He stood up in a rush of scum and reached for a towel. " After all, there's no medical work in an M.A.C.—just an ordinary Service Corps carrying job, even if it is a rather special load."

" Very good, sir."

The Brig was finding his shirt and shorts. " Now, immediate details. ' A ' and ' C ' sections to carry on just as they are—with the other two resting at an hour's readiness. Less six cars from ' D ' that I have a special job for."

" A special job? "

The Brig finished his drink. " The nurses at the hospital," he said, " they're all to go back to Alex—tonight."

Anson had stared for a moment, trying to gauge what was going on behind the glint of those glasses. " Is it—as bad as that, sir? "

The little man made an impatient movement. " Good God, no, man. But it isn't very pleasant here—" He cocked his head and listened. The dull tattoo was beating up again from the south: now something sighed close overhead, to finish in a deep crunch, followed by a long rumble. " Things like that," said the Brig.

So it was true—however much the Brig tried to smooth it over. There was going to be another siege of Tobruk. Then the first thing was to think of his own unit. He had weighed the situation for a moment before he said, " Those caves, sir. The ones by the shore,

east and below the hospital—you know them? There's no one there at the moment. We'd be nearer you—and the hospital, the troops would like the bathing, too. Can we move in?"

The Brig had smiled, not unkindly. It was the moment when both were certain of the other's knowledge. "If there's room—and you're first, go to it."

Anson got up. "Is there anything else, sir?"

"Not at the moment, Anson. Just five cars to be at the hospital for loading at seven. The drivers—I want nice types—" he looked down at his congealing bath for inspiration "—married men."

For the first time that day Anson had felt like laughing. It was typical Brigadier. There was quite likely to be further embellishment. As he waited for the probable instructions on chastity belts, he thought of the work entailed by this proviso in searching the Company Roll. But the Brig did not seem to have anything to add: in the same instant Anson realized it was not a question of the nurses' virtue; the Brig was getting five married men out of Tobruk as well as the girls.

"An officer to go with them, sir?"

"No. A good sergeant—to come under orders of the Matron."

Anson saluted. He was halfway up the dugout steps when the sharp voice called him back. "Oh Anson—in your movement order, give the Sergeant explicit orders as to propriety."

"Propriety, sir?"

The Brig waved his hands. "Dammit, man. They'll be two days on the road, and there's not a bush worth calling by the name between here and the Delta. I imagine they'll want to powder their noses. Instruct the Sergeant to take orders from Matron: when she gives the word, to pull the cars off the road and form a hollow square—then leave them in peace."

It was almost the last straw. "And when they have delivered them, sir, where do they report back?"

"Here—or as near as they can get."

Quite suddenly, he thought he had never seen the Brigadier look so old.

It was after the ambulances had left for the hospital that the signal from the Brig had arrived. It said: ALL CARS RETURNING EX PERIMETER TO REMAIN YOUR HQ AND NOT REPEAT NOT RETURN LOCATIONS. It didn't make sense and as they were in the middle of the move to the new site at the caves, it made extra work directing the empty cars back. "Hasn't Dangle-toes anything better to do?" Anson had snarled as he tried to sort out the tangle. It had taken him twenty minutes to find the five most married and moral for the hospital lift.

Then he had looked up to see Smith, the junior Subaltern, poking his head into the back of the Office truck. "Well, what do you want?"

"Can you let me have some money from the Imprest, Captain Anson?"

"What do you mean—from the Imprest? It's the Field

Cashier's job to deal with your advance-of-pay chits. The Unit's not a bloody bank." Smith had looked uncomfortable.

" I know that. I'm sorry, but I can't find him."

Anson stopped writing to stare at him. " The Field-Cashier? But he's just down the road, man. I saw his tent this afternoon. He'll be back later—probably gone out to pay a Unit."

Smith stared at his feet. " I've just been down there. The tent has gone." Smith had been right. He wasn't there. The place that they knew, where they had come to cash their cheques for months, was just a beaten square of sand with an untidy rim of sandbags pulled back from the edges where the tent had been struck. A few tattered shreds of paper were blowing across the open space. That was all . . .

Anson was late for the rendezvous at the hospital; two sudden, vicious raids cost him half an hour crouched in the ditch by the side of his car. When at last he arrived, the broad turn-round outside the main building was empty. The convoy with the nurses had gone. He found the C.O., apologized to him for not having been there to see them off, and left again. Soon the Humber was once more creeping back up the road to the centre of the perimeter.

On his return from the hospital, Anson walked towards the Office truck. He was not a bit surprised to see a thin streak of light showing through the black-out, and to find, having let himself through the curtain, that the Brig was sitting at his table, writing furiously. " I'm sorry, sir. I'd no idea."

" That's all right, Anson. They told me you had gone to the hospital. I've had a look round the new quarters. Very snug."

He started stuffing the papers back in his briefcase and then his glasses glinted in the light of the pressure lamp as he swung round to stare. " Bring that map-board over here. I want to have a talk with you—" he glanced at the orderly, sitting in the shadows by the telephone—" alone."

" Go and get yourself a cup of tea, Corporal," said Anson. " I'll answer that."

When the Corporal had slipped out through the black-out curtain, the Brig pushed the map-board into the yellow circle of light. He started talking in a quiet impersonal voice.

" There is a change in the whole tactical plan. We are going to break off contact with their armour and go back to the Wire "—his finger traced the line that was the barbed-wire entanglement separating Libya from Egypt—" re-form there, and then come in again. It's become a question of speed of recovery on both sides. But we command the air, so it should be easier.

" While this is happening, the plan is to hold as much of the coast road as possible—*but not as far as Tobruk.*"

" And I suppose we stay inside again," Anson said at last.

" Not all of you—and not for long. The estimate is that the garrison will be contained for a maximum of five weeks.

" And it will be immensely strong this time. And lashings of

everything they will want in the way of supplies is already stocked."

" But some of this Unit will be with them," Anson went on.

" Yes. Twenty-five cars with one officer. To come under the C.O. of the hospital. They will provide all the medical transport for the Garrison. How are you going to detail them? "

There was a long silence. He knew what had to be done; what he had to say.

" Unmarried men, sir—and myself—to stay inside."

" The first, excellent. The second—no."

The relief made him feel ashamed, but he had to go on. " I would like to stay, sir. I should stay. I wouldn't like those that have to—to think anything else. It won't be very funny for those inside for the second time."

The Brig did not answer for a minute. He had pulled his pipe from his pocket and started filling it; as he bent forward in concentration, his shaven head shone like a billiard ball in the glow of the lamp.

" Look, Anson—Corps H.Q. moves out of here at dawn tomorrow, and I have to go with them. The same thing applies to you. I want an O.C. back with me at the Wire, running the Unit, not mucking about in here doing a subaltern's job. Here are your orders. The rest of the Unit to move off at 0400 hours. To reach the eastern check-point by 0425. The senior Subaltern to be in charge. They will go straight to the old location at Sollum. You will stay and tidy up detail. Then report to me at first light."

Anson thought for a minute. " Can I keep Mr. Pugh to come with us, sir? "

" Who is Mr. Pugh? "

" Mechanist Sergeant-Major, sir. It will give him a little more time on the vehicles staying behind—and—"

" And what? " said the Brig.

A raid had started. It was on the usual high-level night pattern—so usual that neither of them had taken much notice. To them it was just a lot of extra noise. They went outside, and for a second both stood looking at the pale slanting fingers of the searchlights, the heavy flicker of the A.A. guns, and the orange flare and crump of bombs.

" And what? " asked the Brigadier again.

" Mr. Pugh—he's sort of the keystone of the Unit, sir. I think there may be a few rough edges over this business—and he'd be invaluable in helping me sort them out."

The Brig had not answered for a moment. He was looking along the line of the harbour. A fire had started in one of the depots: little pinpoints of yellow and orange that licked and jumped out from the first explosion. Then, nearer, another patch of light appeared, starting this time without any explosion, without benefit of the burst of a bomb.

" Yes, keep your Mr. Pugh," said the Brig, " as long as he doesn't have too much kit. Good night, Anson." He scuttled off into the darkness that flickered with the lights of the fires.

All that followed after that had the vague, unpleasant, condensed pattern of a nightmare. The look of the men as they had waited for the names to be called out of the hat; the little sounds that gave expression to the relief of those not staying; the frozen silence of the others when they heard that they were. There had been the rush—too eager, almost indecent—of those going down the road to prepare their vehicles and pack up. The deadly tiredness coming back to him; the furtive drinks. Last, and most clearly of all, his talk with M.S.M. Pugh.

He had sent for him as soon as he got back to camp. Mr. Pugh came in quietly through the black-out curtain at the back of the truck to stand silent, waiting. Tall and very thin, with a russet pippin of a face, and the bluest of blue eyes. They had known each other for so long.

" Hullo, Mr. Pugh."

" Good evening, sir."

Even after these years, their relations, in any circumstance, were always of the most formal.

Anson leaned forward against the desk and knuckled his hands into his eyes, trying to think, trying to bring himself back from that dark sea of tiredness and despair. Then he pushed the bottle and a spare glass across the table. " Sit down and have a drink," he said.

" Thank you, sir."

He had watched the Sergeant-Major tilt the bottle to pour a small tot, then swallow it neat. His eyes had taken in the dark stain of grease on the side of the jaw, the black worn nails of the hand that was holding the glass. Then the overalls, anonymous but for the gleam of the brass coat of arms on the sleeve. As always, Tom Pugh was on the job.

" You've heard? " Anson said.

" Yes, sir."

Anson held on to the edge of the table, fighting to say sparingly what had to be said.

" First—the cars that are staying. There'll be twenty-five. And they're to be the best in the Unit—regardless of who has them now. You know which they are—so tell the platoon sergeants to get them transferred at once."

Tom Pugh wrote in his notebook; he looked up and said, " The present owners won't like that much, sir."

" I couldn't care less. And it will take that cocky look off their faces when they start on that safe road east."

" Very good, sir. And then? "

" Then—" He stopped to stare. Then? He couldn't remember. He looked all round the truck and then buried his head on his arms. " I'm sorry, Tom," he whispered, " I'm so bloody tired . . ."

It was the first time a Christian name had ever passed between them, but the Warrant Officer took no more notice than to slip one key in his form of address. " You've had enough, Mr. Anson," he said quietly.

Anson moved his head sideways, looking at the whisky bottle. " You mean—of that? "

" No. Of everything."

Four years of respect and understanding and something deeper flowed between them in the narrow space while the pressure lamp hissed and spluttered, breaking the silence. Then Tom Pugh got to his feet. " I'll look after it, sir. I know what you want. You get some sleep."

" You're coming with me," Anson said.

The M.S.M. stood quite still. In an instant he was the Warrant Officer again. " I'd rather stay, sir."

" No. You can't be spared."

" I'd rather, sir, I've nothing to go back for—"

There was another silence. Anson thought of that day in Matruh when he had had to break the news of a house obliterated by a bomb in far-away Plymouth. " Neither have I, but that's not the point. The Brigadier says we are both non-expendable—so we go. His direct orders."

" Very good, sir." Tom Pugh looked down at the air-mattress that was laid out under the table. " You rest—just for a bit, sir. I'll attend to everything. Call you, if necessary." The soft Devon voice sounded so very persuasive.

There was the sound of the chair being moved and then the truck went dark as the lamp was turned down.

Anson stared for a moment at a chink of light: flickering, faintly tinged with orange, the reflection of countless fires. Then he went down into the sleep of exhaustion to the sound of the mutter of the guns. And something else: a new, different noise. Beyond the cliffs, on the road, the steady grind of an unending column of vehicles creeping in low gear . . . without a light . . . winding out towards the east on the last night of Tobruk.

Mr. Pugh looked at his watch. He groped his way through the dark patches of the vehicle lines past the shadowed quick movements of the men packing up, the purr of idling engines, subdued talk. The Office truck was black and silent. He climbed up over the tailboard and when he had turned up the lamp, called, " Captain Anson," softly.

There was a sharp crack as the figure on the bed jerked up so suddenly that he hit his head on the under side of the table; then in one movement he had rolled sideways and was on his feet. Tom saw the eyes open, but not awake: the glisten of the tight skin on the cheekbones. This half-sleeping was the most dangerous thing of all.

" What's the time? " The voice jerked.

" A minute before 0300, sir. I thought you would like an hour before the convoy leaves."

" Yes. Thank you, Mr. Pugh—" The eyes had come back and were focused on the table. Then a hand strayed towards the bottle that was there. Tom said, " Let me—" and grabbed the bottle

quickly to pour out two small tots. " Luck, sir." He put the bottle down on the chair behind him.

Anson looked about him vaguely. " You say they're nearly ready to go—is everything all right? "

" Yes, sir."

" I suppose we'd better have a look round them."

They went out into the darkness to the deeper shadows where the convoy was forming up. As they went from vehicle to vehicle down the line, Tom, from the feel of the ambulance or lorry, the faint glimpse of the driver's face, would give all details of load and fitness. The two Subalterns who were going with them followed behind. Apart from Tom's quiet voice, there was hardly any sound: the men, standing by to finish the lashing-down, were silent, with no spirit of the start of an adventure about them.

Once in the darkness a voice passed them, calling, " Timmy . . . Timmy . . ." and someone nearby said, " Dodger's lost his mucking dog again." Beyond, separated, watching, were the dim shapes of those that were staying behind.

Tom Pugh turned from the last truck. " That's the lot, sir. They're the worst—as you said—but they shouldn't give any trouble."

" Good." Anson turned to the two Subalterns. " We'll get in the rear ambulance—then I'll brief you. You had better come too, M.S.M."

When the rear doors were closed and the ventilators stuffed with rag, they put on the inside light and sat in pairs opposite each other on the bunks. The interior of the car seemed very clean and white, smelling of new paint. Tom Pugh breathed a sigh of relief now that he could see the Captain properly. That glassy look had gone from the eyes, the voice when he spoke was natural, firm.

" You, Smith, will command. Prosser take the rear and whip in. Control are sending a motor cyclist to guide you up to the eastern check-post, but they're pretty vague about the state of the road beyond there—and the position on the flank. The best thing you can do is get cracking from there—nonstop—with at least a hundred yards between vehicles. Go to the old location at Sollum and put out a Unit sign. Let the men have one bathe and then get them working." While he had been talking, he had scribbled on his message pad. " There's the movement order."

Smith said, " Mr. Pugh—does he come with us? "

" No. With me, later. I've got to report to the Brig at first light. Unless he mucks about, we should catch you up fast enough to be at Sollum almost as soon as you are there . . ."

Later, they all went out into the dark that was not quite dark now as the tip of the moon was coming up over the escarpment. Tom walked up behind Anson and Smith to the head of the column where the motor cyclist was waiting beside the Lieutenant's truck. He heard the Captain say, " Look after them, Smithy."

Then the Red Cap, who had been looking round, turned to kick his starter.

Like a soft wave passing down the column, the noise of the running engines was increased one by one. The vehicles started to move past them, lurching, gleaming ghostly in the beginnings of the moon. Dim faces looked out of the cabs, little puffs of sand spurted white from between the wheels, there was the soft snarl of power in low gear. Tom stood close behind the Captain, counting—forty-six . . . forty-seven . . . forty-eight. That was the lot. The sounds faded into nothing.

" We'd best be moving soon ourselves, sir," said Tom Pugh.

Captain Anson answered, " Yes," in a flat voice, and Tom started the Humber and drove down the track and onto the road without once looking back.

Their arrival at the entrance to the hospital coincided with one of those complete lulls in the bombardment that made the silence more frightening than any form of activity. As they drove onto the wide gravel sweep in front of the main entrance, an ambulance was parked up against one wall. When they stopped and got out, Tom was surprised to find an orderly standing near it. As they walked over, he stiffened, gripping his pick-handle. But he did not challenge, for both of them were well known.

" What's cooking, Corporal? " said Anson.

" Guarding the ladies, sir."

" *Ladies?* "

The Corporal lowered his voice. " There's two in the back. Two nurses. Got left behind somehow. I'm here to see no one disturbs them; my orders were to stand by until you took over."

Anson said, " Well, what the hell am I supposed to do about them? "

" Here's a message from the C.O. of the hospital, sir."

Anson took the message form and peered at it. " Better cart them along to the Brig, I suppose."

The ambulance stood like a square box against the run-in to the hospital: there was nothing else there and no movement. Tom got back into the Humber and ran it directly alongside. Then he turned to look at the Captain. " Will you take the ambulance, sir? "

" No. You hop in and follow me down to Corps H.Q. I'll get ahead and meet the Brigadier."

When the Humber had moved off, Tom got into the cab of the ambulance. It was a wide platform with no doors at the sides, the bucket seats of driver and orderly separated by a gangway that led to the door communicating with the back; the windscreen, top panel hinged open, was smeared with oil and sand to stop the tell-tale glint of sun that might be spotted by hostile aircraft. He sat relaxed in the driver's seat for a moment and then turned round to look at the door beside him.

There was no sound from the other side. After he had started the engine and adjusted the choke, he let her idle for a minute. He was just leaning forward to put the gear-lever into first when the door opened and a girl put her head out.

" Hullo, Sergeant-Major." She smiled and he thought it was a

very nice smile. He saw that she was slim and tall and somehow serene—not a bit like a nurse, he thought, in those slacks and khaki shirt. The fair hair that was tied back tight behind her head glowed in the dim light, and the mouth, big and generous, was smiling. He could not see her eyes. " Are we off? " she said.

" Yes. To Corps Headquarters first. I think the Captain has to get permission from the Brigadier to move you."

" And then? "

He shrugged. " Back to your hospital at Alex. Two days—if we are lucky."

" Will it—? " she started, but he looked at his watch and then said, " I'd best be moving—that Brigadier gets very testy."

She smiled again. " All right. And we'll keep in the back until you give the word." The door closed and he let in the clutch and went off up the hill after the Humber. He thought: I ought to have asked about the other girl—can't waste any more time now —must later.

It was light now and all the old scenes of the well-known road slid by, one after the other, as he turned and twisted up the loops climbing up from the harbour. Well-remembered, but now so different. He stared more and more intently as he swung from one lock to the other on the bends. It was all changed, for the camps were not there any more: only empty, untidy, turned-over squares of desert where the tents had been. A lot of people had gone in the night.

Farther on, up the higher slopes, there was a new pattern. The transport, pulled just off the road in long straggles. It was the tanks that made him stare hardest, for there were so many; far more than he had ever seen inside the perimeter before. Silent, canted sideways in the ditches, he could see their crews, wrapped in their ground-sheets, lying like grey slugs beside them . . . He started to whistle. *Where do us be going . . . and what be doing of there?* The old Devon song, *Tavistock Goosey Fair.*

The song died suddenly as he stared down the straight stretch of road ahead. If it had not been for the Humber drawn up on the verge and the three figures standing beside it, he would not have known he had reached Corps H.Q. Like the other camps, it had gone. He pulled up behind the Humber and got down.

The Brigadier was standing talking to Anson, waving his arms, and Tom could see that the Captain was angry. Another Staff Captain was busy loading a pile of kit from the sand into the back of their car. The Brig was wearing his best hat and tunic. A bad sign. He went up to the correct distance and saluted.

The Brig looked at him, gave a faint waggle with one hand, and said, " You're late." Then he turned back to Anson.

" I'm sorry. I sent my truck on with the Corps transport because I thought your car would be quicker. Now I find you've involved yourself with two Sisters and an ambulance. Do you expect me to *trundle* back to Egypt in convoy? No, I'll take the car—and Ponsonby can drive it. *You can, can't you, Ponsonby?* "

he roared at the Staff Captain, who dropped the pack he was carrying and said, " Oh yes, sir," hurriedly.

" Do you want us to take our kit out? " It was Captain Anson and there was a tremble in his voice. His face was very white.

The Brig looked up from where he was leaning on the bonnet, writing furiously in his message pad. " No. Dammit, man—you'll have the lot back this evening. We'll look after it." Then his face changed. " Look—I'm ordering you, Anson. There isn't time for argument." He stabbed his pencil in the direction of the escarpment to the south. " They are making a strong thrust, east of here, towards the road. Corps got out in the hell of a hurry, and I don't like being too far behind the Commander—it's uncomfortable. Here are your orders—" he ripped a sheet from the pad—" in case we get separated. These girls are your responsibility. To be delivered to Alexandria by a reliable officer."

Tom was thinking: A thrust to the east of us . . . on the road . . . when and how did they manage to get that far?

The Brig had jumped into the passenger seat. " Come on, Ponsonby. Don't stand there. I'm in a hurry." He turned to grin at the two of them. " See you for supper," he said. Anson and Pugh saw their cherished Humber bound like a wounded animal as the Staff Captain let in the clutch with a bang and disappeared up the road in a cloud of dust.

They climbed into the ambulance in silence.

Tom let in the clutch and soon the engine was snarling under its full thirty horses as they swayed round the last twist on the road before the long straight run to the eastern perimeter. They were high now, the escarpment clear to them, a long brown cliff that flanked the south about ten miles away. Ahead, the black ribbon of tarmac and the telegraph poles stretched out in perspective: empty but for a faint dot that might have been the Humber.

Tense over the wheel, Tom had his foot down on the floor now, while the air roared in through the open screen. Once or twice he managed to flick his eyes over towards the escarpment. Was it imagination or was there a haze hanging over it, vehicles moving? The second time, a little farther east, he saw something quite definite. A ripple of pale flashes that came from the crest. The noise of their own passage was too great for them to hear anything—he did not see the bursts.

He swung his eyes back on the road, keeping them there, not speaking. There was no point in telling the Captain that they were outflanked already—and that Jerry was shelling the road.

Now the tank-trap on the perimeter and the huddle of tents near it were rushing towards them. He threw the gear into neutral and started coasting to a halt. There were only two vehicles there, a lorry and the Humber jammed up tight behind it. Remembering the advantages of dispersion, he pulled up a clear fifty yards behind.

There seemed to be some form of argument going on up there, for the Brigadier was standing up in the front seat of the car, waving his arms as usual, clearly haranguing the M.P. who was standing

in the road. Anson said, " I'll go and see what's happening," jumped down, and started running up the road towards the check-post. There was still no sound from the back of the car. Tom unhooked the Captain's binoculars from a peg behind the driver's seat, then knocked softly on the communicating door.

" Yes? " It opened just a crack, only enough to see her face.

He spoke very softly. " We're at the check-post. There seems to be a delay, and the Captain's gone up to sort it out. How is your friend? "

" Awake—and terribly scared. Sister Norton should never have come on this trip."

" What's the matter? "

" She's too highly-strung—and very young. While we were loading—she and I had come ashore to help—there was a raid. Things started coming down right on the harbour—Sister Norton just panicked. She ran away. They could spare only two men to help me find her—and it was all so dark and strange. It took hours. She was right over on the other side, crouching by the water. Then she wouldn't come back—we had to carry her. And by that time the transport had gone."

He said, " Look—Jerry's started shelling the road and it looks as if we shall have to run the gauntlet. There isn't much protection in these things—just wedge all the cushions and blankets beside you to the right, and when we move off, lie on the floor. I'm afraid it may be a bit bumpy."

She took it quite calmly. " I'll do that."

" Are you sure you can manage? "

" I'll have to."

He said, " I'm just going over to that mound there for a moment —to see if I can see anything."

" We'll stay put." The door shut with a click.

He got down and went over to the little mound that was a few yards off the road. He slung the glasses round his neck, then focused them down towards the check-post.

The lorry and the Humber looked misshapen and foreshortened. The figure of Anson, covering the last few yards, moving in that curious slow-motion gait of magnified distance. The Brig had sat down again, and then Tom saw dust puff from under the wheels of the lorry in front; a second later, the noise of the revving exhaust came back. He swung his lenses to the south, on the escarpment.

The sun was right up, a blood-red disk that rested on the edge of the desert, beyond the point where the straight line of road and telegraph poles vanished to nothing. The colours to the side of it had changed to a pattern of dun and grey and sage: it stretched to the south as far as the ridge of the cliff. There, clear now, like ants on an earth bank, was a host of transport. He thumbed the the fine adjustment to get them clearer . . . Yes, they were moving . . . down the cliff towards them.

He swung the glasses back on the way ahead. The lorry had moved some distance across the tank-trap and onto the road. He

could see every detail of the barbed wire and the minefield as the lorry passed them, dwindling down the line of telegraph poles. Suddenly, short and then in two groups over, slender columns, like black and yellow poplar trees, spouted from the desert to grow upwards in the sky. The " crump " of them came afterwards.

The lorry was beyond, invisible in the cloud of dust. Perhaps it had got through; but Jerry had the range of the road.

The roar of an exhaust came back to him, and he lowered the glasses to the bridge of the tank-trap. It was the Humber being given the gun. He kept his eyes trained on it, hardly aware of the pound of Anson's boots coming back down the road, the shout of " Come on, Pugh, there's talk of closing the bridge."

It was strange to see the foreshortened, open body of the car he had maintained and nursed so long dwindle like that down the black line of the road. The Brig was standing up, arms waving; for a second the light caught the maroon band of his cap. Tom smiled; he thought of the stream of bad German that was being hurled at the enemy. He wondered if it would be effective at a range of four thousand yards.

He saw what happened—exactly, in slow-motion—because he was looking straight at the Humber for that split second of time. One moment it was there: the next, an orange flower seemed to burst into bloom on the right-hand side of the car: the long bonnet whipped round backwards as a running dog might turn to snap at a fly and then everything was lost in a blot of smoke and dust, with one dot that might have been a body turning slowly in an arc high in the air.

When the dust cleared, there was just a spiral of black smoke climbing straight in the sky. He lowered the glasses, feeling rather sick: the first thought was not for the men, or the car. His own tool kit, the special set of ring spanners, that he loved and would not lend, they had been stowed in the back.

He looked down at Anson. " They've had it. A direct hit."

Then the Captain's hand was dragging at his sleeve, pulling him down the slope. " Come on. Quick—while there's still time."

As they ran back towards the car, Anson jerked, " Are they—all right—inside? "

" Yes—I told them—what to do. The other—she's awake."

They scrambled in and started her up, and Tom crashed into gear and accelerated towards the empty strip of concrete that was the bridge. But there were two figures running away from it now, down the road, in their direction. They were shouting—Tom could see the open mouths—waving their arms; no words came to them through the roar of aero engines that were coming in from the east.

" Get a move on, Tom." Anson's voice rose and cracked through it. But the two figures had halted now, spread across the road, barring it, their Tommy-guns at the ready. They were M.P.'s.

When Tom had halted in front of them he leaned out of the cab and looked upwards, watching the glint of silver wings against

the sun as the fighter-bombers circled in the dive of their attack towards the escarpment: then the shooting stars of tracer weaving their patterns to and fro, the fountains of sand spouting among the distant enemy transport. In seconds it was over and the planes were turning and climbing back to gain height for their return to base. The noise of the engines died away. The voices of the M.P. Captain and of Anson came clear to him from the other side of the cab.

" Sorry, old boy. I've just got the orders. Close the road and blow the bridge. You'll have to turn back."

Pugh turned to see him standing with one foot on the step, the Tommy-gun crooked under his arm. There was a sheen of sweat on his face.

Anson said, " Don't be a bloody fool. I've told you twice—I've got two nursing Sisters in the back. And orders, direct from Corps, to get them back to the Delta. Look—" He fumbled for the Brig's signal in his pocket.

The policeman stiffened. " I don't care if you've got the Archangel Gabriel. That bridge is going up in a minute. So get back."

" Drive on, Sergeant-Major." Anson's voice was tight.

As Pugh hesitated, the Tommy-gun came up until it pointed straight at Anson's stomach. He saw the finger curling round the trigger.

" I shouldn't, Sergeant-Major. You'll have a dead duck beside you if you do."

He put the gear-lever into reverse. " Best keep clear of any flying bits," he said. Then he let in the clutch and the ambulance started backwards. The M.P. jumped on the step, holding the windscreen pillar with one hand, gun still pointing. Neither he nor Anson exchanged another word.

Straining round to look past the bulge of the spare-wheel cover, he was surprised at the empty road behind them. Surely there should have been others, they could not be the last out. No, there was something else . . . a good way behind . . . heavy stuff, by the haze of dust it was making.

He heard the M.P. say, " Thirty seconds. Best turn sideways, or the blast may get your windscreen."

He locked the wheel hard down to back off sideways on the soft sand, then cut the engine. As he relaxed in the seat, Anson was knocking at the communicating door. He heard him say, " Lie down, Sister—there's going to be a big bang." Over that, the voice of the M.P. chanting, " Ten . . . seven . . . five . . . four . . ."

He turned to look down the road to the bridge and then it heaved up slowly with bursts of orange and black between the cracks and the blast of it slapped him in the face.

With the noise that followed, the whole thing dissolved into a cloud of dust and smoke; a block of concrete whistled through the air to bounce on the road in front of them, burst, and roll in smaller fragments to the side.

And that was that. They were inside.

Well, they had said Tobruk would be invested . . . but surely there could be no planned investment, if it happened at such a speed. He wondered how accurate they would be over the rest: its strength . . . the time before it was relieved.

The M.P. was talking to Anson. " Sorry, old man. But I wouldn't have fancied your chances out there. Safer inside."

They swung back on the road and started back towards Tobruk, dropping the M.P. at the first screen of tanks that were coming up from behind. As always, the Red Crosses of the ambulance gave them absolute right of way. They reached the road fork that branched right to the harbour.

There was a lot of transport there. Tom saw some British armour and a lot of the 2nd South African Division. Trucks passed them or came in convoy from the opposite direction. It all seemed busy and impressive . . . until you were very close. Then the pattern of movement became aimless. There was a groping, bewildered look creeping over all.

Anson's voice cut across these thoughts: " Did you check this crate for everything? "

" Only the petrol, sir. She's full—twenty-four gallons—but I couldn't very well get in the back to look at the water and rations."

" Mechanically? "

" One of the best maintained in the Company. Driver Grimes has always had her. He didn't half kick up when he had to leave her behind."

Anson looked down to where a name was painted in white on the drab dashboard. " Good old Katy," he said absently. " I suppose that's his wife? "

" I think so."

There was a silence and then Anson said, " Well, the first thing is to stop and check everything. I came this way to be nearer the Supply Depot. If the girls agree, I've got a kind of plan."

He did not enlarge on it, but Tom had guessed. He said, " One thing—tools. We only have the issue kit. Not too good, sir. Mine is—was in the back of the Humber."

Only the snarl of the sand tyres on the tarmac came up to them as both thought of the blackened scrap-heap on the Bardia road. Then Tom said, " And we've only got one jack."

They pulled off the road and cut the engine. The Captain got up stiffly from the passenger seat and went to the door between them and knocked. " Will you come out, Sister? "

In a moment her head appeared and she said, " Where are we? And what was all that noise? "

Tom smiled at her. " Still on the inside, looking out, I'm afraid."

Anson said, " Can you both come out here? We've got to have a talk."

" I'll try and make her—but she's being awfully difficult."

The door was left ajar, and while they lit up their cigarettes, they

heard her voice coming from the back, low and insistent, then the incoherent, sobbing answer of her companion. The first voice rose; there was the unmistakable sound of a slap.

The two men's eyes met and held. Another complication.

Then the fair girl came out into the cab, followed by her friend. Tom could see that at other times she would be beautiful: at the moment, the red, puffy eyes, the white, tear-stained face with the angry mark of an open hand still showing on one cheek were not appetizing. More trouble, he thought.

She did not answer their quiet good-mornings, and slumped down in the gangway with her back against the door. Not quite crying, not quite silent, she looked like a crumpled khaki sack in those creased slacks and shirt.

Anson had got down on the road and was leaning on the windscreen pillar, facing back towards them; the fair girl slipped into his seat. He said, " I'm terribly sorry. We did our best—but we just didn't make it. They were shelling the coast road outside the perimeter when we got there. The Brigadier had the first run—in my car. It got a direct hit. Then our people blew up the bridge over the tank-trap."

The fair girl said, very calmly, " What happens now? "

" First, the Sergeant-Major is going to check all the stuff we have with us: petrol, water, food, everything like that. On that, if I decide that it is possible—and you agree, of course—there is one way to get you out."

" And if not? "

He smiled. " Let's see if it's possible first—before we give in. Tom, have a quick shufty, will you? "

It did not take Tom long to check the cans and the sealed box that held the emergency rations. He started whistling while he worked; there was more than he had hoped of everything, and the Captain hadn't had a drink for hours . . . and didn't seem to want one.

When he went back to the front, the dark Sister—Norton, he thought her name was—was sitting straighter, looking better, though the hand that held the cigarette still trembled.

He said, " The vehicle rations are sealed, sir. That's seven days for four people. Besides the tanks, there's five jerry-cans of petrol—say, twenty gallons. Sixteen gallons of water in tins; some, I can't say how much, in the patients' water tank inside."

Anson said, " We could do it . . ."

The fair girl said, " What? "

" Break out—go south and turn up back to the road."

" And the alternative? "

" Take you back to the hospital—to wait for a ship—if there are going to be any."

They had all been so intent on their problem that the build-up of noise above them had passed unnoticed. The drone of engines, the crackle of machine-gun fire had come gradually; the bump-bump-bump-bump-bump of Bofors fire brought them back to

reality, and then the scream of dive-bombers rammed it home.

Anson was leaning back, staring upwards, shading his eyes. Then his voice came, sharp: "On top of us! Quick—scatter!"

As Tom turned to pull the dark girl from the floor beside him, he saw Anson dragging the other one down in the ditch on the far side. As Tom touched Norton, she came towards him, at first unresisting, then reacted with terrifying suddenness.

She jumped across him, straight out into the road, head down, running with arms flailing. He cursed and dived after her, making a flying tackle that sent them both sprawling into the far ditch. The noise above them had changed to the thinner whine of bombs. He was lying on top of her then, just before the ground seemed to come up and hit them, hard and quick, six times.

It was all noise and debris, with the warm dry dust filling his eyes and choking him; the soft body beneath him had stopped shaking. He rolled over and peered through the fog for the others. They were both there, crawling back along the far ditch.

He picked up the limp body and carried her back.

Apart from scratches, they were none of them touched and they decided that Norton had fainted, pure and simple, from fright. They put her in the back and covered her with a blanket, then beat the dust from their clothes and wiped their faces, the yellow grit coming away in patches to leave the travesty of a stage make-up.

The fair girl scrubbed with the back of her hand. "So this is what it will be like—until it's relieved." There was the faintest tremor in her voice. "I wish I could have a wash."

Tom pulled out a large handkerchief. "It comes off better dry. Take that." She smiled as she reached over for it and then, for the first time, he touched her; something strange and from the past stirred him.

Anson said, "I don't want to frighten you, but I shouldn't count on this place being relieved too quickly—if ever."

She stared at him. "We'll go with you—your way," she said.

"I want you to know what we're in for. It will be difficult—perhaps dangerous." He turned to look at Tom. "Do you remember that track through the minefield—towards Knightsbridge? That one we used in the last siege?"

"I only went over it once, sir. It twists like anything and I bet the marking tapes will have gone by now. Probably been remined too."

"I knew it well," said Anson. "I did it in the dark once. They won't have remined it. No point, up to a few days ago—and then no time. It's worth a chance."

"That's the chance, is it?" said the girl. "Being blown up if you're wrong?"

"Yes. But I'll back my hunch. The next bit will be the tough spot: getting through the ring outside if the place is contained. The only chance is if they haven't enough troops to cover the whole perimeter—that there are gaps. The minefield is wide and

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it looks strong where that track is, so they might leave it alone."

" And if they don't? "

" And we run slap into them? Try bluff. Hope for the luck to cook up a good story. They're pretty punctilious about the Red Cross. It might work."

" And if it does? "

He laughed. " Well, then it's just a piece of cake. Run due south for fifty miles—to be sure to keep out of trouble; then turn east to the Wire; then north, back to the coast, to find our Unit. We'll send you straight on to Alex from there. It will be two-fifty miles at the outside. On what Tom says we have, there's three-fifty miles' petrol—even over the worst going. We've got ten days' water and a week's food. We should be there in two days. What more could anyone want? "

Tom spoke for the first time. He said, " We could break down."

Anson stared at him. " Then it would be the hell of a long walk." He turned to the girl again. " Well? "

" We'll go."

" Let's get cracking then. But stop at the Supply Depot on the way past, Tom, and we'll sling on a bit more food."

As Tom bent towards the starter button, he turned to the girl. " Can you drive, miss? " She shook her head. " I was afraid of that. It means there will only be one of us to do the manhandling. There's some awful soft sand south on the Wire."

" Wait till it comes, Tom. The girls will have to push, that's all." Then he said, " Sister, the best way you can help at the moment is by keeping Norton quiet and staying out of sight."

" I'll do that." She smiled at them and went into the back.

They moved off and soon they were in the main South African Lager area. Tom hunched even closer to the wheel, holding it tighter; there was a little click as Anson opened the flap of the revolver holster that was hanging from his belt.

Round the next bend they came on the Supply Depot. Like a great bee drifting from flower to flower, they drove a zigzag course between the stacks, stopping only long enough for Anson to jump down, lift the sheet to identify, and heave a case onto the cabin floor. They took in sugar and bully and milk, and then Anson shouted, " Get moving, Tom." Before he could start the door opened and the girl's head came out. She was white, and her hair had come down at one side. " I must have a hand for a moment—Norton's so strong, I can't control her." For the first time they were aware of the thin screams and the banging behind them.

" You go." Anson was running round to the driving-seat.

There was nothing to do except slide from under the wheel and follow the girl into the back, slamming the door behind them.

It was dim in there and full of noise, and there was a faint sour smell in the air. He had been out there long enough to know exactly what it was—fear . . .

The girl on the bunk was crouching up on it, her fingers making a scrabbling noise on the plywood wall as she tried to tear it away.

When the other jumped over and started to pull her back, one shoulder showed white where the shirt had split away, then the head, arching back towards him, the eyes tight shut, the mouth a round O from which the screams came in one long high sound that seemed to hit the inside of his head.

" I'll hold her—if you've got a shot of something. It's the only way." He felt the car swaying under them.

The girl was panting. " Yes—in my haversack—Hold tight—she's so strong—" He took a grip, and at his touch she jerked her head sideways and sharp teeth bit deep into his forearm.

The strain was too much for her shirt and it ripped down the front with a dry brittle sound; a smooth pink-tipped breast was straining up through the gap towards him. He almost let go; not from the pain of the bite, but from a feeling of revulsion. It was the first time he had seen or touched a woman since . . .

Now the other was back, ripping the cover from the orange capsule, leaning over him to slide the needle into the exposed shoulder. " No more trouble—for a bit," said the girl.

He saw how tired, how desperate she was. He reached forward and gripped both her arms at the elbows. " Listen, miss. We're going to be all right. We've taken on extra food. Captain Anson will get us through that minefield—I know he can. We won't meet any Jerries. And you'll both be in Alex in three days."

" Sorry— " She was steadying herself against him now and he could feel the touch of her forearms on his—both soft and firm—but it did not worry him as the other had done. Slowly, the trembling stopped; she gave him the ghost of a smile and then sat down suddenly on the bunk. " I could do with a drink," she said. " There's a flask in my haversack. Would you like one? "

" I think we've earned it."

He sat beside her, sucking the pinpricks of blood from the purple bruise, watching her fumble for the flask, hearing the rattle of the neck against her teeth. You wanted that badly, he thought, but you wouldn't scream—whatever happened.

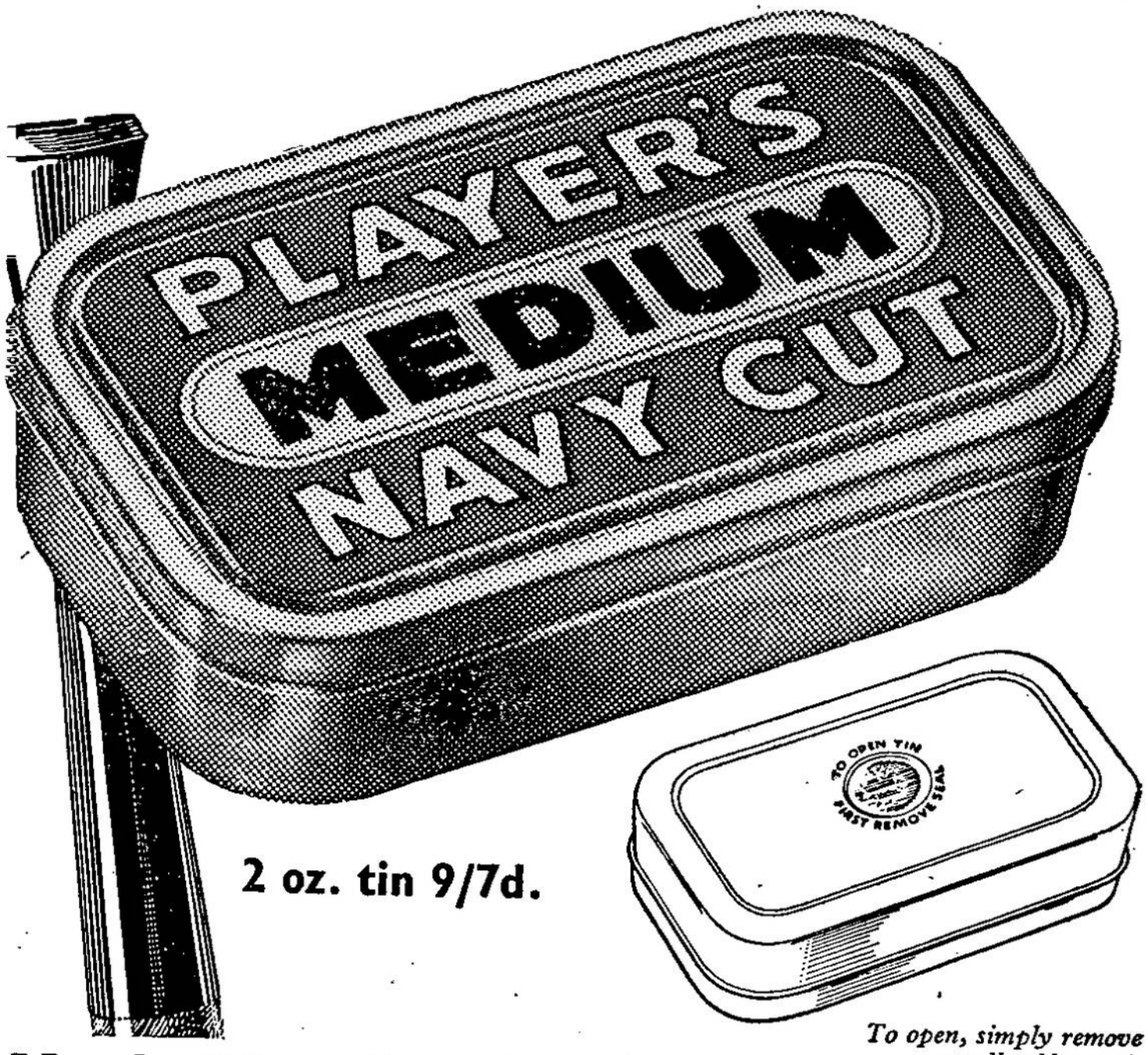
When he had had his turn, he said, " I'd best get back to the cab with the Captain."

She held out the flask. " What about Captain Anson? "

" No, please don't give him one—don't even let him see it."

" Why ever not? " He stared at the floor, feeling a traitor as he searched desperately for the right words.

" He's had a bad time lately—been on the bottle. But he hasn't had a chance to have one since we met this morning. All his own stuff—was on that car. He's over the worst of it now and he'll be all right if he thinks there's none. If he knows there is some, he'll start all over again. And then— " He looked at her desperately—" It's not his fault. No one could ask for a better officer. I've been up and down this desert with him—five times in all. And most of it wasn't funny. He was captured, and managed to get away, but he had the hell of a job getting back to us. Two nights walking, and lying up in the day with no water. And in



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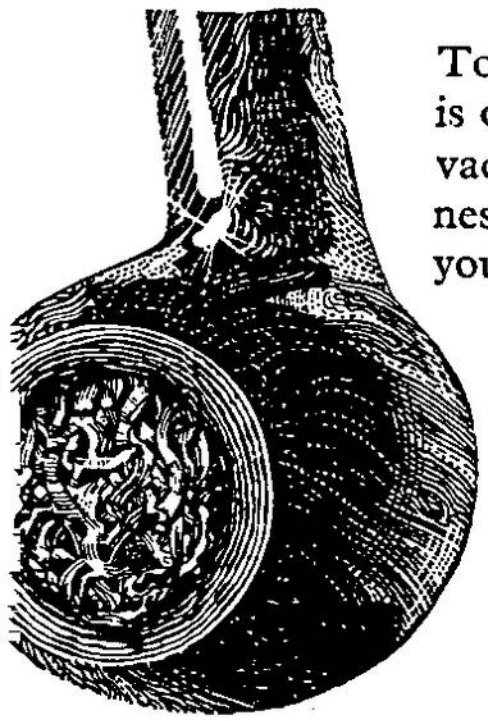

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these last few months, when he should have had a break, he got more piled onto his plate than any man should have to take. Most of 'em would have cracked up long ago, but he's kept going. He's been trying to lace himself up with drink, miss. But please don't give him any.

" I couldn't take you through that minefield—my navigation isn't good enough to risk lives on, so far south."

She said very quietly, " I'm sorry. I didn't know." The flask went back, deep down in her haversack. The noise of the tyres deepened as they started to brake. " Hell," he said, " what's up now? " He pushed open the door and went out into the cab.

The road was empty; a little ahead was a pull-in with a single tent surrounded with stacks of white water tins and jerry-cans. Anson said, without looking round, " All right in there? "

" Yes."

" I'm going to pull in, Tom. That water-point seems deserted. It's worth a few moments to sling on extra petrol and water."

They were coasting in to the track that led up to the tent.

A man was standing in front of the tent, a big square pack slung from each shoulder.

Tom didn't like the shape of that square neck that ran in a straight line into the back of the shaven head; or those deep-set, very blue eyes. The first impression was the size of the man: broad and tall, like an oak. Tom saw the orange bands of the U.D.F. below the badges of rank on the shoulder straps, the brief wide shorts, the calf-high desert boots.

It was their first sight of Captain Zimmerman.

The stranger gripped the pillar of the windscreen with one hand and swung himself up on the step.

He sat down on the floor of the cab, facing them. He looked up at Anson. " Good morning, Captain." It was the clipped guttural English of the Afrikander.

Anson had stopped now. " Good morning. In trouble? "

" Yes. Can you tell me where there's a chance of finding a truck —to get to hell out of here? "

" A truck? "

" Yes—mine's down the road—" he jerked his head in the direction in which they would be going—" big end gone."

" Where do you want to go to? "

" The Delta." He had got down from the step and stood facing them, the packs still swinging from each shoulder. He went on, rocking back and forward on his heels: " Yes, the Delta—where I belong—at my own H.Q. Out of this bloody shower."

" I take it you're 1st Div. What are you doing up here, then? "

" R/T Specialist—attached. But they don't need me any longer —and I'd be wasted in a prison camp. So I thought it would be a good idea to get back where I'd be more use."

Anson said, " I've two nursing Sisters in the back here. Got to deliver them to Alex. They got left behind. We were just too late to get out to the east—and one of them is bomb-happy already."

He looked at Tom. " Is everything really under control in there? "

" Yes, sir. For a bit. The other Sister's given her a shot."

The South African said, " What are you going to do now? "

" Try and get through the minefield, and then feel our way round to the coast behind our own lines. We'll have to keep pretty far south."

" I'd like to come with you."

Anson broke the silence. " It's the extra weight, the drain on water and rations—I don't know—"

The big man lowered his packs to the step. " There's one point I don't understand. If you get through this minefield, how are you going to get through the German troops outside? "

" How do you know they are there? "

He shrugged. " It's common talk in the 2nd Div—and why could you not get out from the east this morning? Be your age, man."

Anson's voice was sharp. " We'll bluff it—I don't know your experience of German troops here—but they usually respect the Red Cross."

" You speak German—either of you? "

" No." They said it in turn.

" Well, I do. Worked for years in South-West Africa. That might be useful. And—if we dealt with that one—I could push. I know the going down there. You'll need a strong man." He flexed the great shoulders, then patted one of his packs. " And last—just plain bribery—I've got a thousand cigarettes and three bottles of gin in there."

As Tom's head jerked round, he was just in time to see Anson's pitiful reaction: the jerk of his Adam's apple and the flicker of the tongue over the lips. In a second the eyes were glittering in their agony and the sweat was shining through the stubble of his chin. Breaking-point had been nearer than he feared.

You stupid bastard, he thought. You weren't to know—but now you've done for us all.

Anson said, " All right—you don't mind if I check your papers? " He turned to Tom. " While I'm doing that, slip on six cans of each, will you? "

Sick at heart, Tom trudged off to the stacks, bringing back two tins at a time, humping them onto the cabin floor, then into the back, stacking them against the back doors. He did not speak to the girl until he had to; she was sitting on the bunk opposite the form under the blanket, head tilted back, eyes closed. The desperation of his thoughts scarcely allowed room for the pity that surged up in him at the sight of the drained, defeated face. But, at the fifth trip, the gin bottle was out in front and they were holding mugs. After the last cans were stacked, he closed the door and leaned against it, looking down at her.

" Miss, there's a South African Captain outside. I think the Captain is going to take him with us. He's got some booze—and they have started to drink. I can't do much. Please help me."

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She opened her eyes. " Don't call me ' Miss ' all the time. The name is Murdoch—Diana Murdoch. What's yours—besides Pugh? I can't mouth through ' Sergeant-Major ' all the time."

" Tom."

" All right, Tom. I'll come out with you and see what I can do."

She came through behind him and Anson put his mug down quickly. He said, " Sister, this is Captain Zimmerman, of the U.D.F., who is coming with us to push. Zimmerman, this is my Sergeant-Major, Mr. Pugh."

They both shook hands and then the girl looked down at the bottle and mug on the floor of the cab.

" What's this—a party? "

" Sort of. One for the road," said Anson.

She looked at him steadily. " I thought the first part of the road was through a minefield. Is that the usual kind of training? " There was a faint sound as Zimmerman banged the cork back into the bottle.

" The lady's right," he said. Tom watched Anson tilt the mug to drain the last dregs.

The girl said, " Then we go—now? "

" Yes." Anson turned to Zimmerman. " I should warn you. This track—it may have been remined—"

" What are the chances? "

" About even money, I should think."

" Fair enough." He looked round at them for a moment. " After that—the chance of being stopped. We shan't have a hope, however well I talk, if you wear that—" his hand pointed to Anson's holster—" or those cap badges. They know them all, and they never let any but medical personnel through."

" But we aren't doctors—any of us."

" We all must be—to them."

" It would be—like going through as a spy. They'd shoot us if they found out." Anson's voice held a mixture of fear and revulsion.

" If we're stopped, the only chance is to let me do all the talking. But I shan't be able to do anything if you have those."

Anson took off his cap and looked at it for a moment; then unstrapped the holster. With a quick jerk, he sent them both spining to the side of the road. " We'll have to, Tom." Then he turned to the girl. " We'll have to rely on you to look after the back. Keep on the bunks—as far forward as you can—in case a back wheel hits something the front ones miss. And don't come out at all until I tell you."

She said, " All right, Captain Anson," and went into the back.

" You drive, Tom." Then Anson gave a last hard look at the South African. " It's understood, of course, that I command this party? "

" Of course."

Tom let in the clutch and they moved off. He drove fast, and the noise of their movement and the fact they were in the lee of the hill seemed to blank out all other sound. The three of them

sat in a row, Anson in the passenger seat, and Zimmerman on the floor against the door, listening to the snarl of the tyres on the black road, eyes flicking at the scattered transport that was all they were passing now.

Tom slowed down and swung the car off the road, taking a line on the row of empty four-gallon cans that were strung out up the hill. The heavy box of the ambulance car lurched and swayed. When they reached the crest, a small shallow valley unfolded before them and then another, higher ridge that cut across the sky. Beyond that, Tom knew, was the descent into the minefield.

" When you get to the bottom, Tom, turn right, along the Wire. I think I'll spot the old gap. We'll stop and check it on the bearings I've got on the map."

" O.K., sir." As he eased her down the slope, he looked across the field and then up the ridge on the far side. There was nothing: no movement, no sign of vehicles. They were alone.

The wadi, though broader, was the pattern of them all: the steep rocky walls, shading grey to brown in contrast to the flat bottom of softer yellow sand. It looked like a river against the sides, the illusion heightened in this case by the ragged, rusting coils of wire that gave the impression of banks. Among the patches of camel-thorn were blackened piles of metal. Everything was still—and somehow, the more menacing in its stillness. With nothing to see, there was a feeling of being seen.

They kicked up a cloud of dust as they ran fast down the slope and then skirted along the edge of the Wire. One gap . . . two . . . and then Anson said, " That's it, Tom. I'm sure. Stop and I'll take a bearing." Tom watched him get down and then move a few yards out of the ambulance's magnetic field before putting the compass to his eye and taking a bearing right and left on landmarks on the opposite ridge. He came back to the car, sitting with map-board on knee, drawing with protractor and ruler.

" That's it." He walked round to Tom's side. " I'll walk in a bit and see if any old tracks are there—or any sign of re-laying." He looked up at Tom and smiled. " I'm sorry about that drink this morning—I could do with it now." Then he turned and started to walk down to the gap in the Wire. Tom swung the car round in a half circle so that they were facing down towards him.

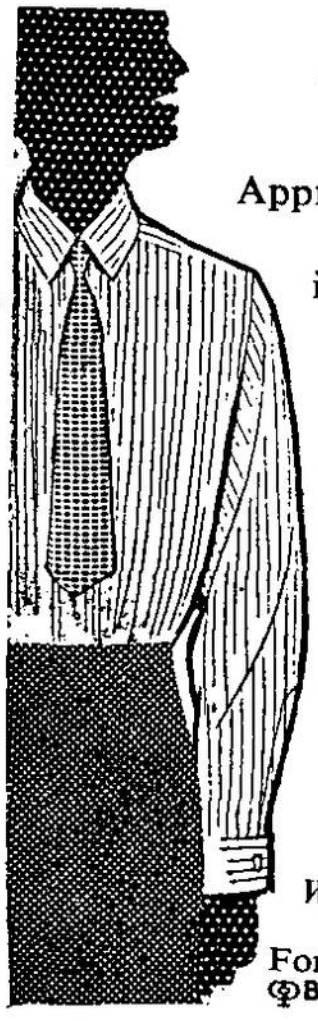
Zimmerman did not speak, he did not speak. Both sat quite still, watching the slight figure dwindle as it walked out into the field.

It was an odd sort of walk: slow, with one foot placed in front of the other like a tightrope walker, head bent forward as if he were searching for a valuable lost at yesterday's picnic on the sands. When he had gone about twenty yards, he stopped suddenly, took a jump of a few feet, turning left again, and came back towards them in the manner he had used going out.

Zimmerman shifted. " What the hell's he doing? "

" Found an old track—walked along it to see if there were any signs of re-laying. Then he jumped to the opposite one—and he's doing the same thing back along that."

Kit inspection?



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Tom spoke through gritting teeth.

" Man, he's got some guts! " Zimmerman said.

When Anson reached them, he was almost cheerful. " It's all right to the first sharp turn. The tracks are very faint, but there is no sign of re-laying. But I think we had better walk the whole thing, though."

" But that will take hours, sir."

Anson looked up at the ridge. " No one's objecting to us yet. And, with the girls, it would be better to be sure—than sorry."

Zimmerman stirred. " Look—if one was to walk the other track at the same time, it would halve the time, wouldn't it? "

" But—I can't ask you to do that. You're heavier than I am."

Zimmerman swung his legs out of the cab and stood up. He slung the bigger pack over his shoulder. " A Springbok can go as far as any bloody Englishman," he said. " What do I look for? "

" Take the left-hand track. Watch for any place where the ground has fallen in, or the marks of the tyre do not follow on. Go slow, and if you see anything you're not sure of, give a shout, and I'll hop over." He turned to Tom. " And don't you follow up closer than ten yards."

" O.K., sir." Tom looked at Zimmerman. " Wouldn't you like to leave the pack in the cab, Captain? "

Zimmerman gave him an odd smile. " No, they're my valuables. I'd rather they went up with me than with your ambulance."

The path through the minefield ran zigzag, always with the longer legs down the length of the field. The turns were the worst for him to follow on their path, but in a way it was a relief to have them come back close and guide him round foot by foot. In the other time, there was nothing to do except watch the two figures as he crept along behind them, in bottom gear, intent on Anson's slim back, expecting any moment to see it disappear in a cloud of smoke and flame and shattered flesh. The sweat was pouring down his face now: salt smarting in his eyes so that he could not see. He brushed it away with the back of his hand, but more came to take its place.

They were in the middle—at a turn—when the first intrusion came into their lonely battle. Droning high overhead in the wide bowl of sky came a single plane, circling before it went away: then from the far side, the German side, came a faint crackle of automatic weapons and the soft sighing of something passing overhead. But he dared not turn to see.

There was no more firing and they went on, creeping, feeling for each step. It was on the last, longest leg, when the sweat was so blinding that he had to stop for a moment, that the door opened behind him, and Diana came out of the back.

She came quietly and quickly, and he did not know she was there until her voice came.

" I just couldn't stand it any longer in there," she said.

He could not look round. " We're in the middle of the minefield. You get back."

" I know we are. I've been trying to look out through that little side window. I couldn't stand it."

" The Captain will be livid. You get back, miss, like he said."

" Not ' Miss.' Diana. Isn't there anything I can do? "

" The sweat in my eyes—I can't see. There's a handkerchief in my trouser pocket. Can you get it out and wipe my face? "

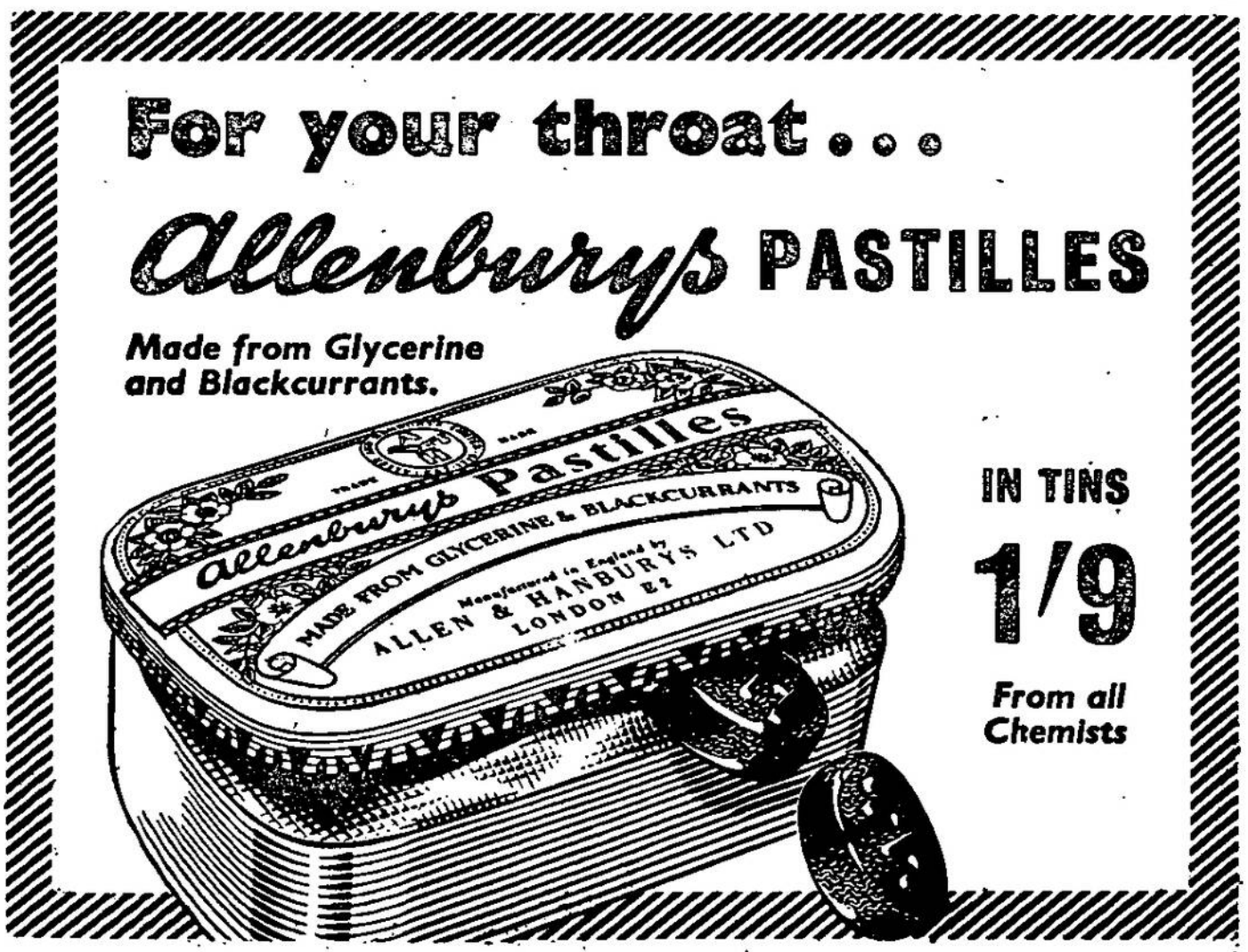
He felt her hand groping down against his leg and then the relief came of the mopping of his forehead. " Thanks," he said, " I wouldn't like to muck the whole thing up—on account of a little sweat—after he's done so much—"

" I think both are doing wonders." She was crouching beside him now, wiping gently, steadily. The sweat was still flowing, but it didn't matter any more.

" You love that man, don't you? " It was very soft. When he didn't answer, she said, " Sorry—I'm putting you off."

" No. I like you talking. If you don't mind me not answering when I'm at a tricky bit." There was silence again before he said suddenly, " It was at Sidi Rezegh—we were with ambulances then —and one dawn we got overrun by Jerry tanks. I think it was a mistake—in that light they couldn't see what we were. We got shot to hell. In the confusion, I got left, without my truck."

Another pause while he swung the wheel, staring intently at the slim figure of Captain Anson walking in front. Then he said, " I was just standing there, the stuff cracking all round, wondering whether to dive in a slit-trench or run, when the Captain swans up



in his truck—as cool as a bloody cucumber. All he said was, ' Morning, Mr. Pugh. Want a lift? ' And he hauls me in—about four hundred yards from the leading Mark IV—and we go likkety-split after the rest, with bullets clanging into the back of us all the time. Then he said, ' How careless of you not to arrange transport, Sergeant-Major.' And a bit later, when we had a bad burst from them, ' Do you think we are showing them the most ladylike view of our arse? '—Sorry, Miss Diana—but that's the sort of man he is, really. I wish I had a son like him."

There was a dreamlike quality to the movement over those last few yards—a feeling that something must happen, that they could not be through. Then they were through the break in the Wire, on harder ground, with the walkers waiting for the ambulance to pull up to them. In silence, they all turned to look back at the silent yellow river they had crossed.

Zimmerman leaned against the side of the cab, wiping his arm across his face. " Man, I'm sweating." He looked back across the field. " But I don't believe there's a bloody mine in it, now."

" There were," said Anson. " Plenty."

The girl got up. " I'd better get back. Norton's showing the first signs of coming to." She went through and closed the door.

Anson gave one look up the silent empty slope that stretched on towards the skyline in front of them. " We had better take it diagonal, south-east. I don't like it—too damned quiet."

" You drive, sir? "

" No. My legs are too shaky. Carry on for a bit, will you, Tom?"

Zimmerman said, " What about a drink first? "

Tom, cursing silently, inwardly, watched the eyes light up and one hand come forward; then it hesitated and fell back to his side as the expression on his face changed. " No. Make it later—we must get on."

They piled into the front of the cab and started moving off up the slope. It was steep and there was no chance of seeing what lay beyond until they reached the crest. They moved steadily, and were about halfway up when the noise came breaking over the sound of the engine and the rumble of the tyres on the rocks.

It came from the air: the sound of aero engines that changed to the scream they had heard over the harbour.

" Dive-bombers! "

Tom did not know who shouted it first, but the car was stopped and they were running away from it, scattering. Then he remembered the girls, turned on his elbow from where he had fallen, to see what had happened.

There was only Zimmerman ten yards away, on the far side. The Captain must have gone in the back, but it was too late to do anything about it now.

He could see the glint of the bombers: there were eight. Their dive steepened and at the moment of release the bombs were plain, like clusters of black eggs. But they were not the target; in an instant he had rolled to his knees, looking down the wadi.

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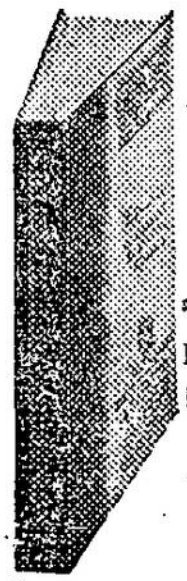

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In a pattern, far down beyond where they had crossed, he saw the ochre fountains spew up across the minefield, the smaller blobs that rippled out in strings from their bases as the mines exploded by concussion. So that was the way they were going to get through.

The noise came, thunderous; the bombers climbed and turned, heading back to the east. Far away, there was a dry crackle of machine-gun fire and then one dark spiralling plummet staining the sky. He got up, dusted himself, and ran back to the car.

Anson was already in the driving-seat, shouting, and the engine was running as he and Zimmerman climbed on board. " Come on —for Christ's sake. You know what that means. They're going to attack." Then they were bumping on, accelerating up the hill.

Zimmerman turned to him. " So—it was live, after all? " Then he started to say, " Man, that was a fine bit of navigation across—" when his voice died and they were all staring at the sight of the plain that was opening up to them over the crest.

The sun was high now and the mirage had started; but, whether they showed as thin black rods, far to the south, or sprawled like fat slugs on the nearer fringe, there was no mistaking what they were. They were running at an angle towards a Lager of German tanks, ready to go into the attack, at a range of about a thousand yards.

Anson swore horribly, put his foot right down to the floor, and the engine snarled as they turned a few more points to the east. The going was better now they were on top: hard gravel and

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clumps of camel-thorn replacing the rock. They ran diagonally, like a hare before the guns at a corner of a field, jinking and swaying as the Captain cut in and out of the patches of green. Tom watched the speedometer needle hovering over the forty-mark and even at this time the engineer came to the fore.

"Watch out, sir, watch out for holes—you'll bitch all the springs!"

Anson did not answer and beside him Zimmerman, crouching, peering past his shoulder, called, "They're coming to cut us off." Behind, in the back of the car, Tom could hear screaming; then he too could see, beyond the Captain, the plumes of dust trailing out behind two trucks that had appeared from among the tanks and were heading directly towards them.

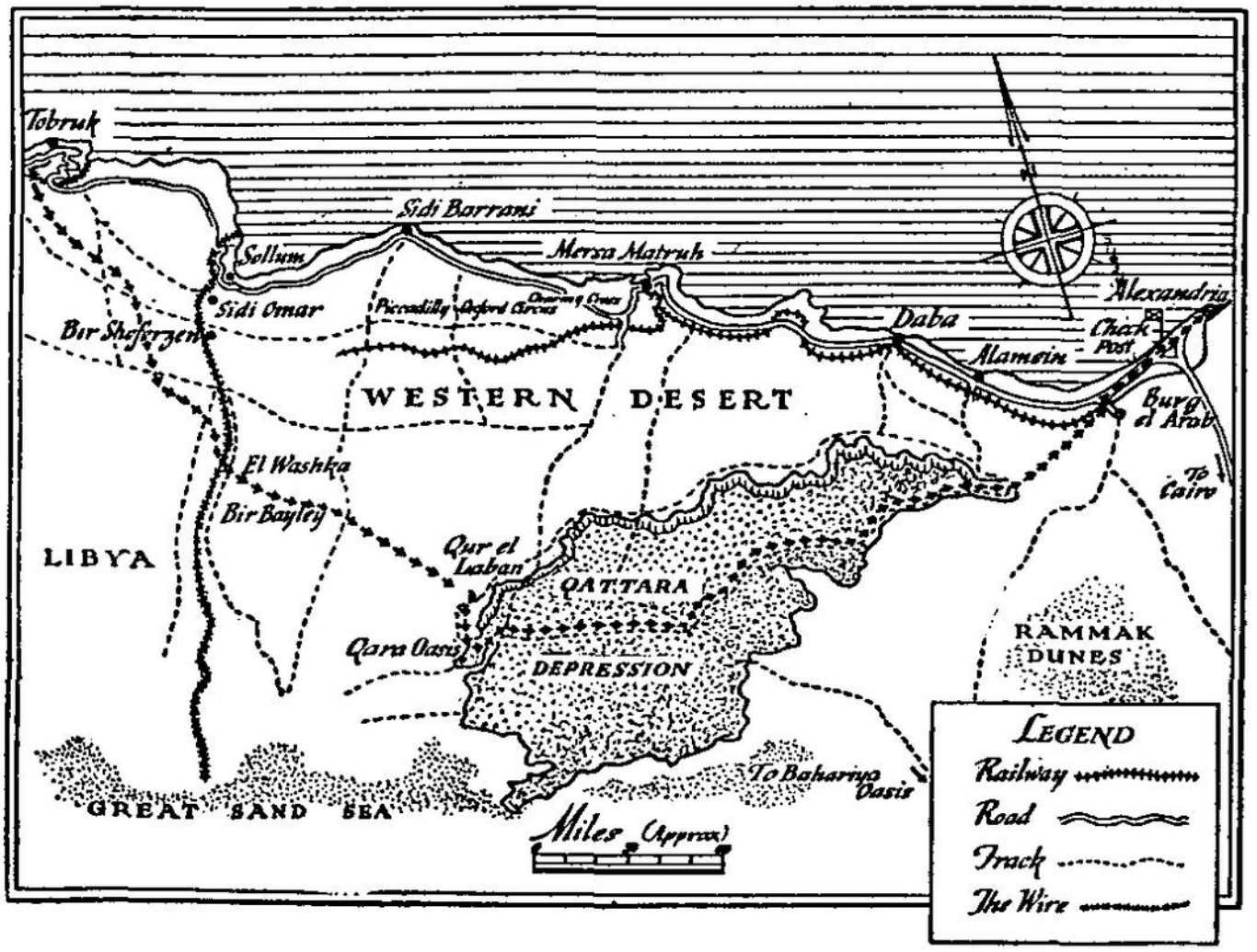
Something whined directly above, and then came the cracking of giant whips all around his head. He knew the fire was coming straight at them. "Turn the stern towards them," he shouted.

"No. The girls—" Anson swerved, but did not alter course.

Then another noise came—a deeper, angrier sound, like a great stick being scraped along a paling. The body of the car jumped and shook and Tom knew they had been hit and cried out to stop but he knew that the Captain would not heed him.

Then the door behind pushed hard against his back and as he rolled to one side his heart turned over in terror at what he saw . . .

★ ***The Second Part of Ice Cold in Alex, by Christopher Landon, appears in next month's Argosy on sale Oct 10.***



ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

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Solution on Page 80

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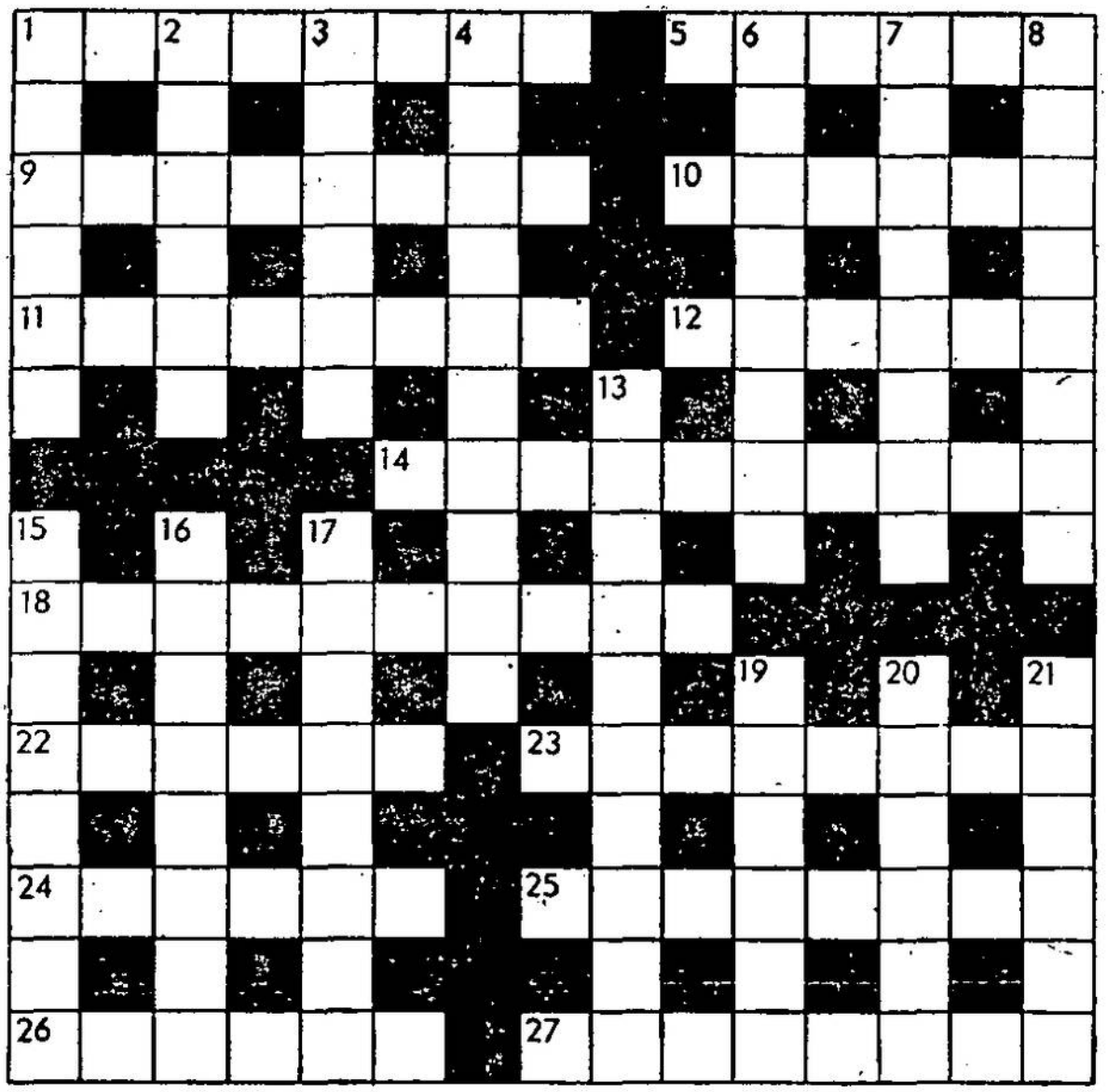

CLUES

Across

1 Stray pet entangled in the arras (8).

5 Odd messmate for a carpenter (6).

9 Deer enjoins an insect to marry in haste (8).

10 Rubies scattered in contusion (6).

11 Darlings of the flock (3, 5).

12 Held up chaps who held up travellers (6).

14 The drizzle sounds paradoxical (4, 6).

18 A talk with Lancelot's girl-friend (10).

22 Goneril loses fifty in this area (6).

23 No stay-at-home (8).

24 Some of their orders are to beg (6).

25 She has such a swarm of admirers! (5, 3).

26 Ancient ones have an undisturbed outlook (6).

27 "This —— built by Nature for herself" (Shakespeare) (8).

Down

1 Unmistakable signs of harness (6).

2 Place a French marshal on the bridge (6).

3 The consultant holds a ruler (6).

4 Regarding the innkeeper (10).

6 Sealed, or intoxicated by deep breathing? (8).

7 They're pretty, but where's the pot of gold? (8).

8 Metallurgical fishermen? (8).

13 Cop a number somewhere in Brazil (10).

15 Full of disdain (8).

16 Oriental process of price fixing (8).

17 Drat! There's a comeback in this for a 4's opponent (8).

19 For example, little Herbert? (6).

20 "I dreamt that I dwelt in —— halls" (Alfred Bunn) (6).

21 Hasten to a capital (6)

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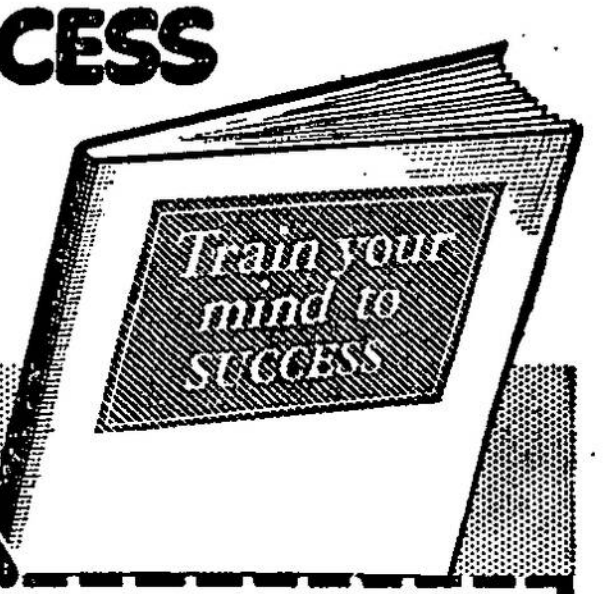

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(A stamp for reply appreciated but not essential)

PRACTICAL RESULTS

Student 357/3015: I have had my story accepted by **BLACKWOODS** who are paying me £25 for it. . . *Student* 778/2119: I thought it might interest you to know that **THE COUNTRYMAN** has accepted a sho article of mine on an country custom . . . *Stud* 184/315: As you suggest I submitted the articles to **NEW STATESMAN.** One w published on the 17th Jul I have also had an article accepted by **MEN ONLY** . . . *Student* 181/282: You may be interested to hear that I had a letter from the Editor of **ARGOSY**; they offered me Twenty-five Guineas for my story . . . *Student* 591/287: You will be pleased that my article submitted for my Second Lesson was published in the **DAILY MIRROR** and I received Six Guineas for it . . . *Student* 120/288: I have established contact with the Editor of **PUNCH.** The item was accepted for "Charivaria" and is a good start . . . *Student* 1179/347: I succeeded in getting four Big Game stories into **COURIER** and another about "Shrove Tuesday." Another article appeared in the August issue of **BLACKWOODS** . . . *Student* 1954/157: I have just corrected a proof of my story for **WIDE WORLD**: they have since accepted another and I have sent in a third . . . *Student* 171/162: I have sold my story to **EVERYWOMAN** for 25 guineas . . . *Student* 1106/156: The B.B.C. accepted the script for the Light Programme—fee 9 guineas—after my first lesson . . . *Student* 141/76: The article which I wrote for the Second Test paper appeared in the **SUNDAY-MAIL.** Thanks for the recommendation.